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[TELLING THE OLD, OLD STORY.]

A WOMAN'S MERCY.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE SPELL.

THE crowd, hoping they would sing again, followed the three Graces up closely. The girls became panic stricken; a clock chimed out the hour of ten, it was time they were home; but how dared they venture near their aunt's place with this clamouring crowd at their heels? Diana stood still a moment to decide what best to do, then said,—

"Let us go as fast as we can till we come to a street that leads into King-street, then we can lose these folks by slipping into one of the Rows; they will think we live there, and leave us."

"Lead on," said Ruth, brightly, "if we get murdered for our money we can't help it; only pray look out for a paved row that is lighted. I should be frightened to venture down one of the dark ones—they have such a bad name."

They hastened on up the road, their followers lessening, until the foremost among them were three tall relentless fellows bent on getting some fun out of the singers, who went on through the driving rain at a fine pace into King-street.

Charles Dickens said "Great Yarmouth is one vast gridiron, the bars represented by the rows." Never did a gridiron promise a greater roasting than was promised to these girls. They did not stop to choose, but plunged into one of the narrow cobble-stone paved passages where the houses frowned upon each other like a too-closely packed audience.

They paused a moment to take breath, when by the light of a single lamp hung from a high doorway they saw three dark forms approaching through the murk and blackness of the night, and trembled as they drew together to allow their pursuers to pass.

These bonnie country girls did not lack physical courage; they were too well accustomed to the long dark lanes of their native Wiltshire, and had once been lost together on Salisbury Plain, and survived to tell the tale. Now they stood back to back, and determined

to make a stand for it, as they would have done had this been a country road with tramps approaching. They knew they all had strength and courage, and they were so near the bustle of the town they thought they had no cause for fear.

The dark forms, gigantic in the shadows came on; close to them they paused, and one said, "Why so fast, pretty birds? This is a dark nest to seek alone."

Di faced the speaker firmly, her high strung voice answering fiercely with the exultant pride of a young huntress, "We are close home, my men, and see no cause for fear. What do you want of us? Don't come closer, my umbrella hits hard! If it's a matter of 'money or your life,' say so; we are not going to faint."

A merry laugh answered her, and Ruth, her voice shaken with passion said, "Is it manly, think you, to worry women like this? Go your way as we go ours."

She tried to brush by as she spoke, when one of the men who had stood back in the shadow said sharply, "You may go when you have paid toll."

A huge pair of arms were put out barring her passage, and two eyes, true and bright as steel, tried to look through the sheltering veil and see her face. Ruth shrank back trembling to Di's side, and Liv, feeling she had got them into this dilemma, said entreatingly,—

"Pray let us go in peace if you are gentlemen; you can see what a horror you have brought upon us; if you are not, and it's money you want, take it and go."

The entreaty in her voice told. Their persecutors stood aside. "Come, let them off, now," said one, "we've carried this joke far enough. It's bad form to frighten women, whoever they are."

They drew back, and the girls flew on and were quickly lost in the darkness. Then the three men looked into each other's faces in the lamplight, and Rodney said with a deep breath, "By Jove! our three Graces. I knew their voices the moment they spoke. Well, this is a queer start, what does it mean?"

"Heaven knows!" said Athole, moodily; "I can't make it out at all."

"Nor I," said Cecil; "but let us judge them leniently. It may be only a girlish frolic, but it is in bad taste nevertheless; and I wish we had not found them out."

The girls fled on in breathless haste, and were soon in the safe shelter of their own room, when Ruth, to their consternation, sank on the sofa insensible, and Liv burst into a passionate fit of weeping. Di only kept her composure; she restored Ruth, cooled Liv, and then coaxed them off to bed; but they were too excited to sleep, so she sat down beside the bed and tried to make the best of their position by assuring them that the gentlemen could not have recognised them. Then she counted their gains, and, large as they were, decided it was bought at a cruel cost to them.

Ruth shuddered. She fancied those clear steel eyes had looked into her very soul; they made the light of her dreams that night. She thought that she had paid tribute to their power with her sweet lips, and felt a strange new joy flutter at her heart like an imprisoned bird, and some dream-voice whispered that it was love.

The girls awoke to see the sun slanting brightly through the window blinds, and heard their aunt's voice below speaking to the landlady. They hurried up, dressed themselves in their fresh crisp muslin gowns, and hastened down to breakfast like three sister blossoms bathed in dew.

"You girls are late; I've been up and out some time. Is it not a wonderful day? real Sunday weather! You must hurry over your breakfast. I want you to have a walk before church; one must not lose such sunshine as this; everything is so freshened by last night's rain. See how the creeper has twisted its bonniest bunch of violet bells to peep in at us. How delicious they are."

The girls hastened to the bay window, each to steal a flower to fasten in the white bosom of her dress, when they shrank back confused and crimsoned, for just outside paraded their three admirers, who bowed gravely and passed on, leaving the girls to look into each other's faces in perplexed silence.

Breakfast over, they tied on their huge white hats, and draping themselves in their mantles, went out three as bonnie English maidens as ever the sun shone on.

They went farther than they intended in the bright breeze, and had to hasten back, but, after all, were late for church. They followed their aunt into the cathedral grandeur of St. Nicholas' Church; the full tones of the fine organ saluted their ears; people looked up as they passed up the aisle; their bright faces and pure white dresses seemed to carry the sunlight with them. They were settled at last, and soon lost all thought of self, carried away by the impressive service and the sacred splendour of the organ's celestial sounds. Someone passed them hymn-books; they looked up to see their three admirers again. Ruth turned pale, but Di and Liv flushed up like well-sunned roses.

When the service was ended they trooped out with the rest of the congregation, but had to wait in the spacious porch for their aunt, who bade them stay till the people had gone, as she wanted to show them the stained glass window put up in honour of the poor needlewoman who did so much good among the sick and sorrowful. Of course they waited, and they did not wait alone, for when they went quietly into the church again they found their "fates," as Liv called them, mooning about close to their aunt, who knew all the beauties of the church by heart, and was glad to see such interest and reverence for holy things in three such pleasant gentlemanly young men.

The girls in shy silence allowed their aunt to point out all the objects of interest; they even sat in the natural seat formed of the bones of a whale's head, and duly admired the "Descent from the Cross" after Rubens; had a sight of the ingenious old reading-desk, black letter Bible, and the wonderful Venetian Missal of the Book of Hester.

Still they were followed by their devoted admirers, who flattered Mrs. David by their strict attention to her conversation. Diana's eyes flashed as she met Rodney's appealing look, and drawing Ruth's trembling hand through her arm, she walked proudly ahead, and took her sister out into the air, and waited till Liv and their aunt should appear.

They were alarmed to see her come out still escorted by the three young giants and a white-haired old man, who they saw introduce the gentleman to their aunt and sister. Then they were beckoned forward, and went through the same ceremony. While they heard the pleasant-looking old gentleman prattle away about the fine tone of the organ, the beauty of the sacred pile, and so on, the young gentlemen made the best of their opportunity with the girls. When their aunt turned her face homewards she was full of praise of the white-haired gentleman, who, she said, was one of the most eloquent preachers in England; and she liked the look of the plain stout gentleman he had introduced as his nephew, and who, he stated, was also intended for the church. Being a woman, she found something, too, to say for the handsome young Lord Caithness and his relative Athole Ventry. But the girls were unusually serious and silent. Mrs. David thought it was the force of the fine sermon working in them for good.

That evening they were again met at the church porch by their fates, who escorted them home, and their aunt was coaxed into taking a long moonlight walk with them. The girls forgot their fear, for the good breeding of their new friends prevented them from feeling sure they had been recognized.

During the week following, the young fellows made huge strides in Mrs. David's good graces, and it became the usual thing for them all to meet in the morning and make plans for the day; such plans, too, framed for all sorts of fun and real enjoyment. One day it was a long drive to Somerleyton, another perhaps to Norwich. Then they would picnic on the Broads, pretending to fish, or ramble together through the cornfields merry as children out for a holiday.

Mrs. David, though she felt a little uneasy sometimes about these intimacies, decided it would be a pity to spoil the girls' holiday, which was so much more jolly since the gentlemen had joined them.

The sun was shining on the sea—"shining with all its might"—one bright breezy morning when the young folks met as usual on the sands after morning dip. They were all very merry and full of life; they had been listening to the open-air concert and hearing no end of ridiculous comic songs, but they were in a mood to be amused by anything, and so seemed to enjoy them.

"How calm and bright the sea is," said Ruth.

Athole looked into her sweet face and said, "Suppose we all go for a row; we men can row. It is just the day for it, not at all rough, and I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

Everyone eagerly accepted the proposition but Mrs. David, who begged to be left behind to read her book in peace.

"Nonsense, auntie," said Athole, "you must come too, and steer for us; we can't trust these larky girls of yours."

At last it was agreed that they should charter a large boat, and go without a boatman, of course. Once clear of the sands the sea was blue as a harebell, and reflected the golden sunshine back to the rosy sky. A long distance out a steamer lay at anchor, as far as which they agreed to go. The young fellows pulled well together, lifting the old tub over the waves in fine style, singing in full sweet harmony, "The Three Fishers."

When they sang "Each thought of the woman who lov'd him best" Athole's eyes sought Ruth's, and hers fell beneath the ardour of his look, and somehow something seemed to sink heavy in her heart, as they came to the closing lines,—

"For men must work and women must weep,
And the sooner 'tis over the sooner to sleep,
And good-bye to the bar and its moaning."

"Oh, let's be jolly!" said Liv, with a queer little twitch about her rosy mouth.

"Make the girls sing for us then, auntie," said Cecil.

The three fair faces flush up hotly, and a swift denial sprang to their lips.

"Nonsense, girls," said Mrs. David, sharply; "don't be affected. You all sing well, and know it; so strike up at once like good girls."

They felt there was no help for it. Rodney gave Cecil a savage look, and Athole's eyes flashed fiercely; he was annoyed because he saw sweet Ruth's embarrassment. Diana, with a defiant look at Cecil, at once started the Canadian boat song; Rodney immediately roared out in his big bass, and Athole joined in lustily. The girls then took courage and sang on happily enough, their fresh sweet voices mingling with the summer breeze floated away to beat about another world.

All at once auntie held up her hand to command silence, and said in her cheeriest manner, "I am sorry to interrupt you, but my feet are getting wet, which means 'screws' to me, and perhaps a leak in the boat. Suppose someone sees what's amiss."

Rodney knelt down and discovered a large leak in the bottom of the boat, through which the water was fast flowing in. They were a long way from the shore, and not a boat nearer than the steamer—still a good pull away.

Rodney looked serious, the girls turned white, and everyone began to chatter at once, till Auntie said coolly, "The situation is perplexing, but we must make the best of it. Now, girls, remember mother's words, 'to be at your best, be busy'; take the gentlemen's hats and bale out with them with all your might, while they do their level best to reach the steamer. Don't look so scared, girls; at worst, one may as well die with the sun above one as with a ceiling. I've got an umbrella; you girls, too, have umbrellas; trust to them and our friends here, and remember that God walks upon the waters."

While she was talking she helped to keep the water within bounds, and the men bent to their oars with set looks. Oh! what an endless row it seemed to the big ship.

"You won't do it, boys," said Auntie, sadly, and the girls hands shook at her words. "Give me your shawl, Di—red is a danger signal. I'll hold it up like a flag, someone on the look-out may see it and send a boat to our rescue. If the worst comes to the worst, boys, I rely on you to save the girls; never mind about me, my life is lived out; I shall be glad to finish my holiday in Heaven."

The impromptu flag fluttered in the breeze, the girls toiled on at the baling out and the men strained at their oars.

"Di, darling," whispered Rodney, "remember we'll float or sink together. There is really no fear; we could save you all—the plucky old lady into the bargain."

Athole's eyes sought Ruth's, and told her more than speech.

A man, idly lounging on the deck of the steamer, lifted his eyes from his paper, threw the end of his cigar overboard as a shout came borne upon the slight breeze that sounded like "Help!" He sprang to his feet and saw a fast-sinking pleasure boat and something red floating from its end. Quickly seeing the danger he ordered his men to loosen the boat alongside, and sprang in, followed by a sailor. Strong surer strokes swiftly carried them alongside the sinking boat, and soon its occupants were safely transferred to their boat. Just before the boat put off from the ship, seeing the yearning eyes of Ruth looking at him with startled love, Athole kissed her before them all, forgetful of all but the love in her dear eyes. They were quickly rowed to the ship's side, and were welcomed with hearty cheers by the sailors, who secured the leaky boat, and did all that was required of them cheerfully, for the sight of three such pretty girls made them feel gallant. The whole party was easily persuaded to stay on board to dine with the captain, a jolly fellow, who got up a concert at dusk for the girls' amusement.

The girls started for shore by moonlight after such a merry day on the sea as they had never before experienced. The homage of the sailors' eyes was good to see as the girls were handed over the side merrily shouting back good-night.

Long afterwards the sailors toasted the Three Graces, and recalled their sweet songs, and sweeter looks when far away from "home and beauty."

CHAPTER IV.

"FRITTON DECAY," said Rodney, lazily curling a lock of Di's dark, damp hair round his fat finger.

"We have been pretty well everywhere; yet I agree with you 'tis too hot on the sands. That was a pleasant day we spent at Filby Broad; do you think we have ever had better sport than we had near the inlet called like you girls, 'The Three Graces'?"

Athole lifted his hat from over his eyes, and said: "By Jove! that was a splendid day; let's try to have just such another." Here he threw a handful of sand at Cecil's back—Cecil had soaked Liv away from the reef and was making an immensity of love to her. "Look here, old man, what do you say to picnicking at Fritton Decoy? we shall get plenty of shade there?"

Cecil came towards them leisurely, looming above a big blot upon the brightness of the unclouded sky. "Let us go by all means, it's enough to kill a black here. No wonder auntie, plucky though she is, has given in to the heat. The glare of these infernal sands is enough to blind one. What do the girls say?"

"Ruth says she would like it awfully," said Athole, peeping from under Rue's huge white umbrella.

"Speak for yourself, sir," said she, showing her lovely glowing face as she agreed it would be nice to get under some trees. Di said she, for one, had had enough of the sea for awhile, and wished herself back to the grassy orchard at home beneath the big apple tree, with her lap full of strawberries.

"Greedy mortal," laughed Rodney; "you shall have the shade, the fruit, and my society this afternoon, and if you are good I will read to you. What do you think, boys?" These girls have never read "Through the Looking-glass," or "Alice in Wonderland." Think of the treat we can give them!

So it was settled that if auntie gave consent they should start at once. Auntie consented, glad to be left alone to get rid of a feverish headache that made gentle-hearted Ruth want to stay at home to tend her, but auntie firmly refused; so Ruth went with the rest, dressed like her sisters in cool muslin, and her pretty face shaded by the brim of her big white hat.

It was a hot drive along the dusty roads; they could not look about them for the glare of the sun, so sat together sharing the white

umbrellas between them, paired off as their hearts desired.

Arrived at Fritton Old Hall they got out, gave orders for a late tea, took their hamper of fruit and wine, and started off in high spirits for the shelter of the wilderness of wooded land that lay round the deep, still lake, making it look like a mirror framed in foliage. The deep, cool green shade was truly delicious after the dust and heat of the journey.

The party found a spot so edged in by trees, the full foliage of which drooped to their feet and mingled with the tall ferns, that just a peep of the shining sunlit lake showed.

Here they rested, talking all sorts of merry nonsense, eating handfuls of fresh fruit, and drinking light iced wine.

They were all too lazy for some time to suggest any other employment; then Di proposed to pull round the Broad; and Liv said she was dying to see the Decoy, and all the picturesque beauty of the place; so Athole and Ruth were left alone. Athole got out his fishing-tackle cast in his line, fixed his rod, and waited patiently for a bite.

Every now and again the music of laughter and song floated over the water to them. A light breeze had sprung up, and the whole scene was as beautiful as Nature could make it.

Liv frolicked on through the wood tearing her pretty skirts, and ruffling her pretty hair, which, light as thistle-down, was stirred by every breath.

Cecil followed her admiringly, now catching her up and trying to persuade her to rest; then losing her in the thicket as she—the arch coquette—played hide-and-seek with him. At last, tired out, he caught her, and made her sit down among the ferns, and told her she was

to sit "A rose set round with little white thorns, And as sweet as English air could make her."

"How quiet you are," said Athole, baiting his hook afresh as he looked at Ruth's pale face and great dreamy pensive eyes. "Does your head ache, dear?"

"Oh, no," said Ruth, rising and coming to his side; "I was only trying to fix the beauty of this place in my mind for ever."

Close beside them a tree dipped its lower branches in the water, and on its top a bird sang as though it was to be its last hour of song, and it wanted to crowd as much music into it as possible; a butterfly settled on the ruddy ripples of Ruth's brown head, and a great unspeakable happiness rested on the young couple.

"And there is even happiness that makes the heart afraid," quoted Athole, as he looked into the azure depths of her pure eyes. She started and flushed red as the heart of a rose; he had spoken her thoughts so truly. She was afraid of the great uncontrollable joy that beat so hotly in her heart.

"If such scenes as these could fill our lives always what promise would there be to tempt us to Paradise?" asked Athole.

"God's presence," answered Ruth out of her simple faith.

"And do you not feel God's presence here, pet, in all this beauty?"

"Everyone must feel His presence in His works," she answered.

A long silence came upon them; then Athole lifted her up to a bough that offered a safe seat. Ruth fixed a bunch of bright wild flowers in her belt before she trusted herself to speak, then she said, "I shall scold you if you take such liberties with my dignity."

He laughed; every nerve quivered at the momentary joy of holding her in his arms. He leant his elbows on the bough beside her, and looked into the lovely drooped face; fondly lifting her eyes, Rue met his adoring gaze, and her lips quivered as she said sadly, "Do you know our holiday ends next week?"

"No, does it? And when shall I see you again, Ruth?"

"Perhaps never." She said this with a desperate attempt at calmness.

"Well?" said he, and he sat and waited.

"How dare you say such a cruel thing to me?"

"I dare do much, sir." "Perhaps; yet you dare not live without my love, Rue."

Her voice trembled as she said, "What makes you think that?"

"Your eyes, your lips, your voice. Oh! my darling, I know you love me."

His hands were about her waist, his eyes compelling hers to meet his. Rue was silent; a deadly calm seemed to have settled on her senses, chaining her under a spell of silence. The flowers fluttered and fell from her waist; her bosom heaved beneath its light covering. A wild duck flapped its wings, as though to warn them the hour only was theirs—to be alone.

Athole still devoured her with his eyes. Prudence, ah! even honour, was forgotten because of this passionate adoring love of his that made earth Heaven. Love had at last slipped from her mooring, and sent him adrift on a fast, eddying tide, that was to lead him whither he knew nor cared not.

"Need I say I love you, Ruth; can't you feel it deep down in your pure, true heart? Look at me, dear, and let me hear you say my love is equalled by your own. Say 'I love you, Athole,' for without those dear words to complete the glory of my dream all hope is dead. I am a rough wooer, darling, yet my love is strong and true. Don't look so frightened; my love is no unholy offering, no unworthy gift, for with it I give all that is mine to give."

"Hush! Athole, your honour is not yours, your life is not yours, but both are God's, so keep them unsullied. Remember your promise to your cousin."

"But, darling, if I go to her, and beg her to release me from an engagement in which love was not mentioned; if I show her all my love for you, the glory this love has, and how impossible it is for me to take another to wife since I have met you, and if she releases me—remember she does not love me—and I return a free man. Oh! Ruth, tell me what your answer will be then. Say, sweetheart, will you be my wife?"

Still Ruth was silent, and he continued passionately,—

"My own, may I hope that you will ever yield all the sweetness of your pure heart to me? Surely you can say you love me; it cannot be that you have been making a fool of me?"

The fierceness of his tone frightened her, and she looked up. Ah! foolish moth to meet the glittering beam. Why flutter your fragile wings so fondly, and, weighed down by the weight of your own sweetness, fall into the fire of his masterful love, and let it burn into your soul for ever!

He saw the love leap to her eyes, saw the fair face droop as though to hide the gladness and glory of her pride in him. She was his; he felt the truth through every pulse of his demanding manhood. He drew her to him, and pressed a long kiss on her lips as though he sealed her his for ever.

She gave herself up to the delicious sense of being the centre of another's existence; for oh! she loved him with all the strength and freshness of first love.

When he released her her eyes were heavy laden with the dew of a great emotion. Swift to see the unshed tears, he said remorsefully, "My own, my treasure, what have I done to make you cry? I am a rough fellow; you shall teach me to be gentle and considerate to my sensitive love. Don't look so sad; why, my every nerve quivers with the joy of loving you."

"But, Athole, will it be for your happiness?"

"It will be for happiness, for life, for heaven, my own; for were I to lose you all that is good in me would die. Will you not say what I asked you, Ruth?"

"I love you, Athole. Ah! though you may not believe it because I have seemed so cold—I love you as fully as well as you do me. You

must not wonder now that I yield my will to yours, for love is a woman's life."

"Ruth, I know you are one of the purest women in the world—one who can feel such fire as this, and still have a white soil even as the snow crowns the mountains that have fire in their hearts."

He kissed her again, almost reverently, and smiled to see the crimson flood her face afire at his caress. Then he whispered a verse of a song she loved.

"Only a touch and nothing more,
Ah! but never so touched before.
Touch of lip was it, touch of hand,
Either is easy to understand;
Earth may be smitten with fire or frost,
Never the touch of true love lost."

"Ah, my love, there lies all the beauty of it—the quintessence of my content 'never so touched before.' No other voice has wooed you; no other lips have pressed the sweetness of those perfect lips; no other man has held you to his heart and called you his very own. Say, is it not so, Ruth?"

"Yes, Athole, no other than yourself has so touched what your love has sanctified. Let me go, dearest; I can see Liv's white skirts through the trees, and our love must be a secret till you can claim me before all the world."

"Little wisdom," said Athole, fondly, as he pretended to concern himself about his lack of sport.

Cecil threw himself down on the long grass, saying, as he looked up reproachfully at Liv, "That fairy must not be let loose among these trees, some brownie will steal her." The splash of oars caused them to look out upon the water and see Rodney's boat come slowly in. Di's face was bright as the sky above, and Rodney said merrily,—"Oh, we have had a good time under the trees under with 'Alice in Wonderland.' I'm sure Di must be half dead with laughing; she says it is the drollest book she has ever read."

Athole went forward, and helped them to land and fasten the boat to a tree while they went to get a cozy tea. After this they had another stroll and a delightful drive home by moonlight.

The next day Rodney informed Ruth that Athole had gone to town, but would return the following day if all went as he wished. Ruth's face flushed beneath Rodney's inquiring gaze; she knew Athole's errand, and fancied by his friend's look he knew it too.

Regent's Park was radiant with all the glow and glory of sweet summer time. The jolly sun sent its cheering beams into one of the handsome houses that face the park, and peeped respectfully into the deliciously shaded drawing-room. It was an artistic room, quaint and picturesque, panelled in dark wood, brightened by glinting mirrors and pictures with backgrounds of dead gold. Fleecy rugs relieved the sombre expanse of polished floor; furniture of black and gold upholstered in rich satin; antique lace curtains shaded the stained windows, while flowers of varied tints bloomed everywhere. A tiny fountain of pure alabaster sent forth sparkling sprays of scented water.

Beside the little fountain a lady stood lost in the long, long thoughts of youth; her hands were clasped behind her holding a huge fan of peacock's plumes, that contrasted well with the creamy tint of the Indian muslin morning dress she wore flowing about her in billowy whiteness, like shaken sea foam. A sort of moonlight beauty shone on the pale olive-skinned face—a face small and severe in its perfect refinement of features, with nothing startling about it except the velvety darkness of the indolent eyes that spoke of slumbering fire, and the vivid beauty of the close, quiet lips.

A bunch of purple pansies nestled under her rounded chin, and a big cluster of the same sweet flowers relieved the sombre gloss of the smoothly braided hair. The greyhound, immovable as a dog of granite, crouched close to the tiny impatient foot that beat quickly upon the polished floor.

The door opened quietly, and a firm quick

step broke up the stillness. Vivian Damian lifted her fine eyes, her face swiftly flushing into fresh beauty as she held out her tiny jewelled hand, saying, "Something told me you would come to-day, Athole. How good it is to see you."

Athole Ventry took the outstretched hand and pressed it then kindly, his face flushing and paling beneath the inquiry of her eyes. The mere clasping of hands was a cool greeting to give a promised wife. Love is swift to read the loved one aright, and so Vivian felt rather than saw the change in her cousin. She saw all the old merry fondness had faded from his eyes, which were now only regrettably tender to her.

"Something has happened, Athole; tell me at once what is the trouble, dear. You look ill and anxious."

Athole was silent a moment, then burst out in boyish blundering honesty, "You are right, Vive, something has happened; something that must part us, dear. I have learnt to love another woman, and, like the selfish wretch I am, I have come to beg you to release me from our engagement."

Athole felt her hand tremble, and saw her face pale with an awful pallor, only the dusky eyes seemed to live, and they flashed out like the lurid red of the ruby. Her voice was quite steady, as she said with a chill little laugh that somehow shocked Athole by its mirthlessness,—

"So love lives in you at last, *mon ami*, and not for your promised wife! You want your freedom that you may plunge blindfold into a deeper bondage. Tell me how the change has come about? You seemed contented with our parents' arrangements for us only a month ago."

"Ah! queenie, how much a month may compass. There has never been a thought of love between you and me, dear little woman, or I should not have dared to speak to you as I have spoken. We were always, and only, dear friends. We can still be that—friends, tried and true, Vive."

Vivian looked into his face with eyes that never flinched from his scrutiny, yet the memory of those dark, steady, burning eyes never left him in after years, when his heart was sore with sorrow, and his pride bowed to the dust by a bitter sense of dire defeat. The mocking defiant eyes, with their look of worshipful love, and longing and reproachful fierceness, came back and told him something of the fathomless depths of this woman's heart; and the words of the quaint old ballad Ruth loved ran through his mind in lines of fire, "A woman's mercy is very little."

(To be continued.)

The most remarkable of recent opinions concerning divorce (by a woman of course)—"Divorce is all very well in its way, but I prefer widowhood; it's surer."

ANGELICA invited her young man to the evening meal. Everything passed off harmoniously until Angelica's seven-year-old brother broke the blissful silence by exclaiming, "Oh, ma, yer oughter seen Mr. Lighted the other night when he called to take Angie to the drill! He looked so nice sittin' long side of her with his arm—" "Fred!" screamed the maiden—whose face began to assume the colour of a well-done crab—quickly placing her hand over the boy's mouth. "Yer oughter seen him," continued the persistent informant, after gaining his breath and the embarrassed girl's hand was removed; "he had his arm—" "Freddie!" shouted the mother, as, in her frantic attempts to reach the boy's auricular appendage, she upset the contents of the tea-pot in Mr. Lighted's lap, making numerous Egyptian war maps over his new lavender pantaloons. "I was just going to say," the half-frightened boy pleaded between a cry and an injured whine, "he had his arm—" "You boy!" thundered the father, "get out!" And the boy did so, exclaiming as he waited, "I was only going to say Mr. Lighted had his Army clothes on; and I leave it to him if he didn't!"

SNOWDROP'S FORTUNES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"From her Own Lips," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXX.

"FILL my pipe, my lady, if you please."

And John Thompson took a very dirty clay from his mouth and presented it to his better half, with a laugh that rang out over the lawn of Copper Lodge House like the roar of a bull.

"My lady," he said again, as if he liked the sound of it and the baronet—"oh, lord!"

He seemed to enjoy the joke amazingly. But his wife looked frightened. The story that had gone the round of the camp was true. The rich and ignorant speculator, the lucky miser, was also heir to a title and a good deal of property in England. The matter had been in abeyance for some time owing to the difficulty of tracing the present baronet, who had vanished from the places where he had been known, and was supposed to be dead; but the services of Alfred Scrivener had been called into request, and after patient tracking and investigating, and putting together of this and that, the rightful owner of Glenormond Towers, and the somewhat barren acres thereto belonging, and the family pedigree had been found in the person of Mr. John Thompson. He was not ignorant of the fact that he had come of a good family as far as his father was concerned. But the relationship had been distant, and he had never known anything but the poverty in which he had been brought up, and the hard life of an agricultural parish remote from any town or city.

He had married in what seemed his own rank of life, and had had children born to him, who had scrambled up as the lambs and young pigs do, in ignorance that any blue blood ran in their veins, and often knowing what it was to be very hungry and cold when food and clothes were scarce.

There were none of them left now—not one, except the fair girl about whom their rough neighbours were so exercised, and concerning whose beauty there could be no two opinions. But she was worth them all, he would say, with a half sigh to the memory of the shock heads and freckled faces that had gone their way before any thought of wealth came to their father and mother.

She looked up now with a smile at her father's laugh.

"They'll hear you down at the camp, father," she said, "don't tease mother so—she hates to think of it."

"That I do," Mrs. Thompson said, filling the pipe, and presenting it to her lord and master. "I don't mind the money, one can buy all sorts of pretty things with it; but to be called my lady—I shall never know what to say or how to look."

"You'll learn, old girl, never fear," her husband said. "You'll have to go into training, and be presented at court. Oh lord! oh lord! it will be as good as a play, when I think of you in that old red gown as you used to wear at—well, at the old place. And then a making a curtsy to the queen, all velvet and satin. I'm just ready to split, I am. Hand over that light; I've put it out again."

Mr. Thompson was not very refined in the bosom of his family. He did manage to preserve a business sort of manner amongst men where it was necessary, and Llangollen did not hold a shrewder hand at a bargain. But he unbent at home; and not all the titles in the world, nor all the gold that ever was dug out of the earth could make a gentleman of him. Good-hearted and generous to a degree, he would help any one that wanted it in his own rough way; but refinement was not in his line. And it had cost his wife many an effort and much tribulation to arrive at the very moderate pitch of gentility that she had achieved.

With their daughter it was different. The good qualities of the good old stock of the Glen-

ormonds must surely have descended upon her. She did not care for this new dignity that had come upon them, and would have been content to stay under the shadow of the grand hills she had come to love with all her heart for the rest of her life.

Many were the congratulations that poured in on the family at Copper Lode House when it was known that the ladies were there. All Llangollen seemed to be suddenly seized with a desire to call upon the new baronet and his family. Every one wanted to be sure the wonderful news was true, and to see the beauty whose fame had preceded her from Sydney. It was by no means an uncommon thing for titles to crop up suddenly amongst them, and the heir to some estate or honour in England be found in their midst. But it was a rare thing for wealth to be heaped on wealth, as in this instance, and the richest and roughest member of their society to succeed suddenly to a title that he knew nothing about.

"Sir Hilary Glenormond," said Mr. Gower to his friend, as they started off like the rest to pay their court to the new lion; "it is too ridiculous; I don't believe the man can write his own name."

"Oh, yes, he can," Dick Randall replied, with a laugh. "I have seen a specimen of his calligraphy, and it is curious, to say the least of it; good enough for as many thousands as he likes to sign away. I wish he would lend me some of his filthy lucre, or give me his daughter and a good dowry. I would even commit matrimony for the sake of the fortune."

"How magnanimous," his friend said, puffing away at an obstinate cigar with great vehemence; "you ought to be exhibited as a *rara avis*—a disinterested person who is willing to take a lovely girl and something about a million of money, if report speaks truly, as a sweetener to the bitter draught. There are a good many more would be glad to perpetrate matrimony on such terms."

"There are some men who would not perpetrate matrimony on any terms unless Cupid was to the fore," Mr. Randall said. "Am I killing enough, do you think? Is the young lady partial to blue ties? My wardrobe is too poor to furnish forth another."

"I don't fancy she's the sort of girl who would know what a man had on if she liked him," the other replied, adjusting his own smart neckerchief as he spoke. They were dandies in their way, even here in Llangollen, after their work was done, as they had been dandies in another fashion in the time that seemed so far off to both of them now. Linen jackets and straw hats, with no suspicion of a waistcoat, is not exactly the style for Rottenrow; in the camp here it was the very acme of full dress, and it would be a chance if they did not find the gentlemen they were going to visit in a lighter costume still, and with no coat at all on.

Mr. Gower had seen the newly-made lady and her daughter before, so he acted as pilot to where he knew they would be found. He had been a visitor at Copper Lode House at intervals from the time of its erection, having rendered some service to the owner thereof. His friend, who had not been in the place so long as he had, and was of a more reticent disposition to boot, had only known Sir Hilary in business, and had rather avoided the rich man with the sensitiveness of a proud nature daily and hourly humiliated by the irritating sting of an empty purse.

He was somewhat cynical—as Englishmen are apt to be under such circumstances—and was not so happy in adapting himself to his surroundings as his more light-hearted friend.

"Now to see what Ned's swan is like," he said to himself, as they got round to the back of the house, where there was a pretty lawn with a tent and a table and two ladies, one of whom rose somewhat awkwardly, and the other gracefully and easily to receive.

"Ned always raves, and she'll turn out the veriest ugly grey goose that ever wore feathers, I expect. By Jove!"

The last exclamation was involuntary, and

forced from him by the almost unearthly beauty of the girl who stood by her mother's side, and smiled a welcome to them. Tall, lithe, and slender, dressed entirely in white, with her long dark hair falling in masses on her shoulders, and with no ornament of any sort about her, save some knots of crimson ribbon and a sash of the same hanging loosely over her dress. She was a startling vision beside the carefully-dressed but fussy and vulgar mother, to whom she seemed hardly to belong.

There was nothing in common between them except the colour of the eyes, which were alike in all three—father, mother, and daughter—but with this difference: the mother's were hard and cold; the father's good-natured enough, but with very little expression in them; while those of the daughter, the result, perhaps, of education and training, were full of feeling and beaming with intellect. Dick Randall was so transfixed that he could do nothing but stand and stare, forgetting his manners and his duty as a guest and a stranger.

"What's the matter man—are you crazy?" asked his friend, shaking him by the arm.

"Lady Glenormond—Miss Glenormond—my friend Mr. Richard Randall, commonly known as 'Long Gully Randall,' by reason of a doughty deed he performed in that extremely unpleasant locality."

"Don't talk bosh, Ned," said Mr. Randall, recovering himself. "The ladies don't want to hear about that."

"Oh, yes, we do," the girl said, blushing and laughing, "if it is anything about bravery; I like to hear what brave men can do."

"There was no bravery in it, Miss Glenormond," Mr. Randall said; and he noticed that she winced at her new name as if she were not used to it. "Any man in Llangollen would have done the same thing, I hope. I only pulled a man out of a hole."

"At the risk of his own life and the chance of being shot," said Ned Gower; "but you shall have the whole story some day; and I believe half Llangollen would have been glad if he had let the interesting party stop there. There isn't a more cantankerous fellow about than Bill Jones."

"Bill Jones! What Bill Jones?"

The words seemed to fall from the girl's lips with a sort of gasp, and she turned as white as her dress. She had risen to receive the two, and had remained standing; but she sat down again suddenly now, as if she did not feel able to stand.

"There's a good many Jones's in Llangollen," hazarded Lady Glenormond, by way of making an original remark. She did not notice her daughter's change of colour.

"Yes, there are; but this particular one is very well known," Ned Gower said. "He is never sober when he can help it, and he has been a little of everything in the old country—tramp, pugilist, and a good many other disreputable things. I am afraid you are not well, Miss Glenormond," he added, as the new baronet came up and noticed his daughter's paleness.

"Who has been frightening my lass?" he asked. "What sort of talk have you been having to make her turn all white like this, you young fellows?"

"We have said nothing that could possibly alarm her," said Mr. Randall, rather disgusted at the girl's affectation, as he was ready to pronounce it; "we were mentioning my adventure in the Long Gully with Bill Jones—at least my friend was, and—"

"And it isn't a story for a girl's ears," said Sir Hilary; "at least for one like my Nell. She can't bear to hear of blood and knocks on the head and all that sort of thing—can you, my pretty?"

"It had nothing to do with it, father; for I did not hear the story, only the man's name," the girl replied. "It was the heat; there is more of a breeze now. I am quite well again."

She was not quite at ease for all her calm words, and there was a startled look in her

eyes which did not go away again while the two friends remained.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Mr. Gower, as they walked back towards their own hut, and their everyday life. "Did I exaggerate?"

"Not a bit."

"You find her beautiful?"

"I find her the most lovely creature I have ever seen in my life."

"I thought you would say so; but what are you thinking of. Something puzzles you."

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Where I have seen that girl before."

"My dear fellow, nowhere; the man sprang from the very lowest class, and was never heard of before he rushed into notoriety here through his wonderful luck. You could not possibly have seen the girl before, unless you were acquainted with him in his chrysalis state."

Dick Randall shook his head.

"Nothing of that sort," he said; "but I have seen her before. I am like you, Ned. When I looked into her face, and met her eyes, I was back in the old life in a minute. I was dancing, driving, flirting in the midst of flowers and perfumes, and the laughter of gay crowds. The woman is a witch, Gower; I shall keep clear of her for the future."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FROM OVER THE SEA.

EVERYBODY went to the first drawing-room of the season the year that Lady Laura Carlyon made her first curtsy to the Queen. London had seldom been fuller, or the season more prosperous. The Queen was in town, and so much better in health than she had been for some time that she had signified her intention of holding the drawing-room herself, and there was every probability of her staying through the whole ceremony, instead of disappearing at an early stage of the proceedings, as she had been in the habit of doing of late, and delegating the task of receiving the rest of the company to one of the Princesses.

No matter how popular Her Majesty's daughters and daughters-in-law may be, they are not the Royal lady herself; and much manoeuvring takes place to get an early chance of reaching the presence when it is known that she will be there in person. There was great gossip in the fashionable world about Lady Laura; her mother had kept her in the background purposely that her remarkable beauty might burst upon the world all at once, and she had been very little seen for the last two or three years.

She was a daughter of whom any parents might justly be proud, and she was as amiable as she was beautiful. She was fair, with that peculiarly clear skin which sometimes accompanies very dark hair, and hers was almost black, and wavy and luxuriant to a degree. She had all her father's perfection of face, and all her mother's grace of bearing and elegance of form, and she had the deep blue eyes of the Carlyon race.

Not the simpering unmeaning blue eyes that are so common, and which people are apt to call "sweetly pretty," and which are only remarkable in a general way for the utter absence of all mind or expression; Lady Laura's eyes were so dark that they looked almost black in some light, and were full of expression, as changeful and speaking as the varying moods of her mind. Her cheek was swept by the long dark lashes that shadowed them, making a face as near perfection as an artist could have found anywhere in the world.

She was not unconscious of her beauty—no girl with any sense ever is—but her worst enemies could not have called her vain. She gloried in her charms because her father and mother were proud of them; apart from them she would not have cared though she had been the plainest girl in London. She was de

votedly attached to them both, her father especially, and he doted on her, and thought with many a pang of the time that would inevitably come when he must lose her; give his darling into some other man's keeping, and see her form new ties in which he should have no part.

He had not much anxiety on the matter. Laura would be sure to marry well; she was not wilful, and she was not likely to fix upon anyone whom they would not like. Fortune was a secondary consideration. She had enough and to spare. Since the miserable time of the wreck of *La Republique*, and the death of the child who would have stood in her way had all the truth been known—everything that the Earl touched seemed to succeed; his daughter's fortune had increased, and his own means grown till he, as well as his child, was wealthy beyond anything he had ever expected.

Lady Wrexham had achieved her great desire of being known as one of the best dressed women of her set. With artistic instincts and unlimited means a woman may achieve anything she likes in the way of costume. And the Countess and her daughter caused many a heart-burning amongst their poorer friends by their *recherché* costumes and harmonious "arrangements," which somehow always looked the very essence of simplicity, and yet were found almost impossible to copy.

Their dresses for this all-important event in Lady Laura's life had been the subject of much consideration and consultation with the ruling powers of the world of fashion. Two visits to Paris had been made before Lady Wrexham could decide on the style. Choice of colour there was none, of course, as far as her daughter was concerned. Lady Laura must wear the pure white of the debutant, and nothing could be more becoming to her pure style of beauty. White makes some girls look inexpressibly plebeian, and brings out everything that is common and unrefined in their appearance: it simply made Laura Carlyon look like an angel.

It etherealized her, and brought a fresh charm to her delicate loveliness, and her father exclaimed with surprise and delight when he was summoned to look at her attired in the latest effort of the great Parisian authority in female costume, and blushing at her own beauty as presented to her by her looking-glass. A fair vision, indeed, she looked as she stood before her father, and put up her lips for him to give her his daily kiss. He had not seen her before, for she had been in her dressing-room all the morning preparing for the momentous event.

"Not to be touched, papa," she said, "only to be looked at. What do you think of me?"

"You give me the heartache, child."

"Papa! How?"

"Next time I see you dressed like that I suspect it will be to give you away to some one else," Lord Wrexham said, with a smile. "That's all. You are quite too lovely, as your friends would say; you are a credit to your mother's taste, and I fancy that is about the greatest praise I can bestow on you."

"Yes, indeed, papa; it is all mamma's taste. They would have hung me all over with flowers if they had had their way, like the garland children on May-Day down the country; but mamma would not have one more than she chose, and the result is simply perfection, isn't it?"

"As near as it can be, child," Lord Wrexham said; and, indeed, the dress his daughter was wearing was talked of for many a day as a thing of beauty not to be surpassed. No one could quite describe it—the society papers did the usual gush over it, and, as far as material went, no doubt, they were correct. It was a graceful combination of satin and lace, with white lilies in clusters and pearls festooning them; a necklace of rare and valuable ones adorned her neck, and a string of smaller ones was twined in her dark hair. Lord Wrexham seemed as if he could not take his eyes from the beautiful picture.

"I shall be the best stared at man in

London this morning," he said, laughing; "but it won't be for my own sake. People will be envying me my daughter."

"Nonsense, papa," Lady Laura said, with a pleased look in her eyes for all that; she dearly loved her father to praise her, no matter what for. "They will envy you your wife as well. You have not said a word about mamma's dress, and it is lovely."

"As her dress always is." He turned to his wife with a smile as he spoke, and looked at her with admiration. "But I was sent for to admire you, child, and your magnificence throws everything else into the shade. Where did you get that peculiar yellow, my lady? It suits you perfectly."

"The child chose it," Lady Wrexham said, smiling. "It did not strike me as particularly becoming; I thought it would be staring, but I must say it suits me."

It was a curious shade, as her husband had remarked, but it became her dark beauty admirably. It was a deep shade of colour through which golden flashes seemed to run, and was trimmed with flowers that corresponded with it in hue, and had diamond dewdrops on them. Lady Wrexham had certainly never looked handsomer, and there was satisfaction in thinking that she would not see several editions of her dress at the next ball she attended, for it was one that would scarcely become anyone she knew except herself.

She looked like an empress in it; anyone else trying to wear such a costume would have looked like an actress in her stage attire.

"Isn't she perfectly lovely, papa?" asked Laura, looking at her lovingly; "I feel so proud of her, for I chose that dress and the flowers. What do you think the colour is called?"

"I haven't a notion—despair, perhaps. I heard of a colour called undying love yesterday."

"Oh, papa, what rubbish! But this has a suggestive name; it is called 'Proserpine's bronze,' suggestive of Hades and the Styx and Charon's boat, is it not?"

"It is very handsome if it has an unholo name," the Earl said, smiling. "I would not hurry you for the world; but if we mean to be in anything like time we must start. You will have to sit in the carriage and be admired for a long time before you get into the palace, child."

Laura shrugged her white shoulders; she did not like that part of the day's programme at all.

"And take a flask and a biscuit with you," Lord Wrexham said. "The child has never faced the ordeal of a St. James's crush yet, and it may be too much for her. Don't take her before Her Majesty ready to faint."

"I'll take care of her," her mother said; "she shan't faint or do anything she shouldn't. I mean her to do us credit, Rupert, I can tell you."

Crowds lined almost every step of the route they had to traverse; for Connaught-gardens is a fashionable place, and nearly every house was sending its contingent to swell the fashionable ranks at the palace. Amongst the people in the streets there were two who seemed particularly interested in Lady Laura and her parents, and who craned their necks to get a better sight of her as she passed in all her pride of beauty and youth. One was a man of rather odd appearance—a gentleman to judge from his dress—but with a curious look of being anything but at ease in his clothes; his was a face and manner that instinctively set one thinking of picks and spades and fusian suits—a face that would have been much more in keeping with a workman's dress and a bundle or a tool-basket than the light morning coat and the thin umbrella which he handled as if it had been a staff, and which were all too fragile for his rough hands.

He was a pleasant looking man, good-hearted and full of sympathy for everybody in need. Not ten minutes before the carriages began to roll along he had told his companion—who was no other than Mr. Sayers—that he should like to take all the miserable children that were

gathering in the gutters and every corner whence they could see anything, and give them all a good dinner; and the lawyer had laughed and told him that even his colossal fortune would hardly suffice for such extensive philanthropy.

He watched the carriages with much interest, looking at the scene with all a boy's amusement and admiration, till Lord Wrexham passed with his wife and daughter.

"Who—who is that?" he asked, gripping his companion's arm with a sudden grasp that made him wince; "there, in that brown carriage with the green liveries?"

"That is Lord Wrexham; do you know him?"

"I don't know anyone yet. Who's the girl?"

"His daughter."

"She's the very image of—"

"Of whom, Sir Hilary?"

"Of—, well, some one I knew out in the colonies, that's all. Lord Wrexham, and his wife and daughter, eh! I'm glad I have seen them. They're fine women."

"That hardly expresses them, I think," Mr. Sayers said, with an inward snarl as he spoke. He had never got over the disappointment caused by the death of the child on whom all his hopes were founded. He had no reason to complain. He was doing well-enough, and he had caught a new client in the person of the Australian millionaire; but the sight of Lord Wrexham always reminded him of what might have been.

"They are the most beautiful women in London, some people say," he went on. "For my part, I prefer fair women. By the way, Sir Hilary, your wife and daughter are in town, are they not?"

"Yes."

"May I have the pleasure of seeing them? I should like to know them."

Sir Hilary Glenormond might be an uneducated man, and simplicity itself in the ways of the world, but he was shrewder, perhaps, than Mr. Sayers imagined, and he could put down an impertinence as coolly as most people. He saw through the lawyer pretty well, and had come to understand and to laugh at his intense desire to get into society.

"That will have to be as her ladyship pleases," he replied, quietly. "She will choose her own company."

"I am sure Mrs. Sayers would only be too happy to do anything in her power for her ladyship, and—"

"And so would dozens more when she wants it," was the somewhat brusque reply. "She has had loving messages enough to last her life sent her by people she doesn't know from Adam. It only wants money or the reputation of it to find friends in plenty in London. Lady Glenormond will get on very well."

"Insolent brute!" muttered Mr. Sayers to himself. The new baronet was too rich a client to offend with impunity, or he would have bade him good morning there and then, and left him to settle the affairs he had put into his hands as best he could.

(To be continued).

BARNUM is credited with a new idea. When he finds his show too full, he has a very large placard exhibited and borne aloft by two men. It has on it, "This way to the Egress." The men proceed slowly to the open door and are followed by the crowds, who think "Egress" is some strange new animal. The men proceed through the door. There is no readmission to the show.

MASTER MASON, of Trinity College, sent his pupil to another of the masters to borrow a book of him. The pupil was told, "I am loth to lend my books out of my chamber, but, if it please thy tutor to come and read it here, he shall as long as he will." It was winter, and some days after the same master sent to Mr. Mason to borrow his bellows; but Mr. Mason said: "I am loth to lend my bellows; but if thy tutor would come and use it here, he shall as long as he will."

THE PLEDGE OF THE ROSE.

We strayed by the river together,
When the twilight was soft and fair;
She gathered wild buds from the heather,
To bind in her glossy brown hair.
I asked for a rose, and she yielded
A blossom half open and small;
Its heart by its petals was shielded,
My own was not guarded at all.

The blush on her cheek as she gave it
A sweet tale of confidence told.
She smiled as she asked me to save it
Until she and I both had grown old.
We were wandering then where the river
Through a tangle of solitude flows,
And I said, "May I cherish the giver
As long as I treasure the rose?"

"The rose is a fragile thing, dear,"
My darling whispered, at last,
"But perfume round it will cling, dear
When its beauty and bloom are past.
So the love that I pledge to-night, dear,
As you ask me to be your wife,
Will not with my youth take flight, dear,
But will last to the end of life."

The promise that then was spoken,
I knew she would well redeem,
And to-day I cherish the token
She gave me beside the stream.
Around its petals, all faded,
A faint, sweet fragrance has clung;
As the brow of my love is shaded,
While her heart is still fresh and young.
—E. L.

FRIEND AND BROTHER.

CHAPTER VI.

TRUITION.

"BROTHER, the fellow! He hadn't have grudged me that small bit of sleep," was Captain Dynevor's very natural reflection as he turned over in his bed for the twenty-first time. "Kind to Madge, indeed! Does he think I am given to beating her?"

Again he tried to sleep, but he couldn't manage it; and growing more wakeful as time went on, Frank's conduct began to strike him as suspicious, to say the least. The conviction gradually forced itself upon his mind that his early rising meant something more serious than an innocent bath; and he sprang out of bed as if propelled by a steam engine. Without waiting to ring for his man, he scrambled into his clothes, ran down the stairs, nearly knocking over an astonished chamber-maid on his way; and in another minute he was in the midst of a knot of boatmen on the quay, asking if any of them had seen a gentleman go out to bathe.

One stepped forward, who had not only seen the gentleman, but let him have his boat—for a consideration, of course.

"Did he take anyone with him?"

"Not a soul. He even asked my boy to step out, as he wanted to go by himself. He looked at a bit of iron lying over there, and asked if he might take it with him, that's all."

Fred's heart sank as he asked for a boat, and two men, who could swim. All three were quickly provided.

"Now," he said, taking his place in the stern, "five pounds to you both if you reach the gentleman and bring him home to breakfast."

The sailors grinned, and, thus encouraged, rowed with a will. When they were clear of the shipping Captain Dynevor looked out to sea with his heart in his eyes.

If he were too late he knew that he would never forgive himself, and never be able to forget this most miserable of mornings. To think that the friend who had been like a brother to him through all the chances and mischances of the last campaign, never grudging him the last drop out of his flask, when brandy there

was none to replenish it; running the risk of being left behind in that terrible march from Candahar, because Fred's horse had dropped down dead, and Frank insisted on giving him a lift on his own; and then, when the accident happened, which left him helpless as a baby, nursing him with the untiring tenderness of a woman; sitting for hours in the stifling heat of the sick-room, and bearing without one cross word in return, all the grumbling and impatience of an irritable invalid; to think that the friend who had done all this for him had gone out in his misery to end his life, because he, Fred Dynevor, had not had the sense to stop him while there was time!

There was a small speck in the distance—his heart stood still, for he thought it was an empty boat. But no; there was some one in it, who presently stood up with his face turned towards the glowing east. Perhaps he was breathing a last prayer before giving up his soul to God. Almost beside himself, Fred clenched his hands till his nails ran into his palms. The boatmen strained every nerve, but their progress seemed cruelly slow. He knew that it was no use to shout, for if Frank had made up his mind to die, the fact of pursuit would only send him the sooner into the water. He could only wait, and pray, as in all his life he had never prayed before. They were very near now, only a crimson streak of sea, radiant in the glory of the rising sun, divided the two boats. Watching every movement, he saw Frank stoop, and he guessed that he was fastening the lump of iron on to his feet, in order to be sure of sinking. Frank was not a man to play at suicide when he meant it. A cold shiver ran over his body, as every hair stood on end. To see it with his own eyes was too horrible. He turned sick with fear. His coat was off, and held himself in readiness to jump into the water, as soon as the other moved. At that moment Frank turned his head, saw the boat hurrying towards him, and guessing its errand, threw himself precipitately over the side. In an instant Fred had done the same, and one of the men followed his example. The other looked after them with a doleful shake of the head. "He's a gone coon! The iron will keep him under water till there's no use in fishing of him up."

It seemed to be too true. The young fellow in his desperation had done his best to secure his end; the iron had dragged him down to the bottom, and there kept him, for not a trace of him was to be seen on all the wide expanse of water. Fred paddled about hopelessly—dived and came up again, but with no result. At last the sailors told him that he had better get in again. The gentleman was drowned as sure as a moral. He put his hand on the side, giving one despairing look round as he did so. It was almost impossible to him to go back, and give Frank up for lost.

"Look yonder!" cried Ben, the youngest of the sailors, nearly capsizing the boat in his eagerness.

There was a dark something drifting out to sea. Was it a human form, or only a bit of plank? Fred, in sudden hope, struck out after it with might and main. Ben followed, and Jim rowed up behind them. With a gasp of delight Captain Dynevor saw that the "something" was a man's body. He threw himself forward, and clutched it tight, holding on to it like grim death itself, for fear that it might escape him yet. But there was no power of resistance left in Francis Dacre. He was perfectly insensible to everything. As they dragged him with some difficulty over the boat's side, as they stretched his long legs along the bottom and placed his head gently on Fred's knee, there was no sign of life. It seemed as if the sea had given up its prey in mockery—the empty shell, with the spirit fled.

Rowing back to Southampton, the waves still dancing in the roseate light, whilst the sun rose in beauty above the horizon, Fred sat still as stone in the stern, supporting his friend's head with his arm. The water trickled

in small rivulets from the dark hair and the tips of the dragged moustache; the long lashes were glued to the ashen cheeks; not a breath seemed to pass the parted lips. There was a sweet serenity in its beauty, as if the troubles of earth were all passed, and the peace of Heaven won—strangely at variance with its tragic story, but written there in characters that all might read. Was the young life thrown in Heaven's face, taken or given back? A cord seemed to tighten round Fred's affectionate heart as he looked and doubted. Would they never reach the shore? The activity of every-day life had begun amongst the shipping in the harbour; decks were being cleaned and sails shifted, and eager faces looked out curiously as the boat passed by with its silent freight, but Fred heard nothing and saw as little. A small crowd had gathered on the quay, and just as the body was tenderly lifted out a woman's cry rang out sad and shrill, "Too late! Oh, God! I am too late!"

And Margery Brown, who had travelled all the night to be there in time, threw herself like one distraught upon the white face which had always a smile for her in early boyhood, and, with a bitter cry, tumbled down in a heap amongst the men's feet.

CHAPTER VII.

DYNEVOR OF DYNEVOR.

AMONGST the passengers who arrived by the morning's boat from Havre were Lady Wolverton and her servants. She had been spending ten days with her sister-in-law, who owned a fine estate not far from Rouen; and it had been her intention to go on straight to Blagrove, to pass the first fortnight in July with her own sister, Mrs. De Vere Coringsby. But the *mal de mer* from which she had suffered during the passage had brought on an attack of hæmorrhage on the lungs, and, finding her strength fail her, she decided to wait and rest for a few days at the Dolphin before proceeding further. Captain Dynevor, after a sleepless night of watching, had come down to get a breath of air, when she arrived, attended by her maid and her "man." She stumbled at the first step, so he hurried forward to offer his assistance, and was very much surprised when, with a look of vivid pleasure on her suffering face, she seized his hand with the exclamation—"Thank Heaven, you are here! Give me your arm, and help me to my room."

Rather taken aback, he did as he was bid, and under the guidance of a chamber-maid, who appeared to be awaiting the lady's advent, escorted her to a comfortable-looking sitting-room on the first floor. As she sank down exhausted in an arm-chair, he bowed and walked to the door; but she beckoned to him to close the door, and come back. Still more surprised he obeyed, and standing straight before her waited to know what she wanted. His eye, meanwhile, travelled over her figure from top to toe—from the crown of her black lace bonnet down the line of her aristocratic nose, over the handsome, befringed dolman to the hem of her richly embroidered skirt—no, he had never seen her before.

"Sit down," she said, faintly: "come close to me, for I cannot speak loud."

He drew a chair forward, and sat down close in front of her, his blue eyes fixed on the haggard face, which had been beautiful only a few years ago. What could the woman want with him a perfect stranger?

"Last night I thought the end had come; and I prayed with all my strength to God that I might see you once before I died. And so I have." She stopped; her breath came in laboured gasps, and she turned so lividly pale that Fred was quite frightened. "There is some *Sal volatile* in my bag; will you give me some?"

A handsome travelling-bag was lying on the floor with the key in it; Captain Dynevor opened it, and taking out the bottle measured out a small dose, and adding some water from a glass on the table held it to her lips, for

her shaking fingers seemed incapable of keeping it straight. She thanked him with a slight smile, and after a minute's rest revived.

"Kneel down, Frank, I want you close beside me."

"But I am not Frank." (The mystery was explained, she evidently took him for Francis Dacre.)

"Hush! Don't interrupt me, I may die at any moment. Oh, my poor deluded boy, will you, can you forgive me?" and she held out both her hands so piteously that he could not find it in his heart not to take them. I know that you are better, kinder, than other men; but you must curse me when I tell you. Don't say a word" (for Fred, bent on undeceiving her before she went too far, again tried to explain.) "I must tell you now or I may never be able to do it again, and the thought of it is wearing me to a skeleton. I have robbed you of the love of father, mother, sister and brother—of all the sweet home ties you longed for in your lonely life. I have kept you apart from all who would have been fond of you. I have hated and loathed the very sight of you, because you have reminded me of my sin; and at other times I have loved you better, far better, than any of my own children. Hush! not a word. You will know what I have done, and what I have cost you, when I tell you that your name is Francis Dynevor!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Fred, starting to his feet.

"Yes!" For a moment the blood leapt up into her face, the fire came back into her dark eyes. "I loved your father with my whole heart and soul; your mother came between us, and I swore that I would make her taste some of the misery that she had brought upon me. I could not get at her through her husband—he—he was too good, but I could through her children—if she had any. Twins were born. Your mother was taken very ill—they thought her mind was going. She could not bear to hear the sound of a baby's cry, so Martha Simpson was hired as a wet nurse. She could not feed them both, and the other was sent to Margery Brown, who had a baby of her own; that baby died, and was buried as Francis Dynevor. You can guess the rest." She paused.

"And all these years you have carried on the fraud, having tried in vain to break my mother's heart? Why did you break your vengeance on an innocent child?" cried Fred, in irrepressible wrath, as the remembrance of all the misery the deception had cost his friend came across his mind. At the moment he could feel no pity for her, although she looked as if her days were numbered.

"Because I could not undo the wrong without confessing my share in it. Think of my husband, and my own children, what would they have thought of me?" she pleaded, feebly. "Oh, Frank you were never hard, like other men. I thought you were capable of forgiving till seventy times seven."

"I am not Frank," he said, sternly looking down at her, with respectful eyes. "My name is Frederick Dynevor, and my twin brother is lying in the next room at death's door. If you want to see him before he dies you can go to him. He is beyond your influence, either for good or for evil."

"Not Frank! What do you mean by not telling me so before?" Her eyes flashed in hidden indignation.

"I tried to explain, but you would not listen to me. If you want to see Frank, you must come at once," he said, gravely. During the last three days he had been watching by his bedside, and hope had almost died away into despair.

"What has made him ill? He was the picture of health only a fortnight ago," she said tremblingly; not yet recovered from the shock of finding that she had been making her confession to a stranger.

"He tried to drown himself. The life that you had marked out for him was so perfect that he preferred death to living it any longer," was the stern reply.

She shrank together as if his words had struck her like a blow. "Take me to him! He was never rough with me like you are. I think he was fond of me through it all."

"Fond of you, poor fellow; I daresay. And you were like a second Judas—taking his kisses whilst you ruined his life. Oh, God! when I think of it." He struck the table with his clenched fist—remembering that she was a woman after all—he repressed the remainder of his sentence; but the veins on his forehead swelled.

Lady Wolverton buried her face in her hands; rocking herself backwards and forwards, as if that sort of motion could ease the agony of her mind. For the first time in her life she realised the full extent of her guilt; and face to face with Death the sum total was appalling. Could there be forgiveness for such sin as hers? If the man whom she had injured died in consequence of the misery which she had indirectly brought upon his head, she felt that her last chance of a place in Heaven would be gone. She thought of his ruined boyhood, of the day when he had been turned out of the only home he knew; and a tearless sob rose in her throat, and nearly choked her. Standing up, she leant against the table for support, and looked entreatingly at Frederick Dynevor, who stood by the mantelpiece, with a heavy cloud on his handsome face. Interpreting this look as a wish to go to Frank he walked across the room, and held out his arm, without a word. She took it gratefully, for her knees were knocking together; and she felt as if she were unable to take a step without assistance.

When they entered the next room, which was large and comfortable, with a bow-window looking over the sea, a woman's figure rose from beside the bed, and came towards them. "Margery!" exclaimed Lady Wolverton, in great amazement.

"Yes, ma'am, it's Margery," said the old woman, dropping a curtsy. "I thought there would be mischief between the two, and I came all the way here to prevent it. But I was no good; and I couldn't save Master Francie." A tear fell down into her cotton apron, with the corner of which she wiped her eyes, as she made room for Lady Wolverton to pass.

Silent she stood by the bedside of the man she had wronged, and her heart sank lower and lower into the very depths as she looked down on the beautiful face, which was the exact facsimile of the one she had loved so hotly from twenty to thirty years ago. The tears gathered in her eyes, and fell upon the wasted hand lying so helplessly on the counterpane. Her heart felt ready to burst. So simple, and loving, and frank and true—all these she remembered him in the sinful past; and if it all should end in a suicide's grave, would not some of the sin be left on her own shoulders? and with this added burthen, how could she ever face her God? The wind swayed the curtains to and fro, and rustled in the leaves of a newspaper which lay on a table, crowded with medicine bottles, and the usual accompaniments of a sick-room. There was no other sound except the invalid's irregular breathing and old Margery's sobs. Captain Dynevor stood against the head of the bed, pulling his moustache in stony silence.

It was more than Lady Wolverton could bear. "Frank!" she whispered, "speak to me!" and she ventured to place her trembling hand on his burning forehead. He turned, and fixed his large eyes upon her, staring vacantly. "As you have sown, so ye shall reap," he murmured, distinctly. The words had evidently a connection with some delusion of his brain, but they came shuddering home to Lady Wolverton's heart. The unhappy woman threw herself upon her knees with an inarticulate cry.

Captain Dynevor put his hand on her shoulder. "You had better come away," he said, briefly.

"Not yet, not yet," and she shook her head passionately. "I must hear him say that he

forgives me. Frank, dearest," she leant forward, with the utmost entreaty in voice and action, "say that you forgive me, or I cannot die in peace!"

The restless head stopped in its tossings, the eyes opened wide, the lips parted.

"Say it, Frank—you forgive me!" she prayed, as if her life depended on the words.

"Their curse shall rest upon you till the end. Oh, God! there is no other way but this!"

His mind was evidently running on his own intended suicide, but Lady Wolverton took the words to herself. With a gasping, choking sob she sank down upon the floor, and a crimson stream flowed from her lips along the flowery carpet. Fred carried her most tenderly to her room; his anger melting at the thought that her last comfort had been refused. She must die unforgiven.

Telegrams were sent to Lord Wolverton on the one hand, to Mrs. Dynevor on the other. Many hours must elapse before either could arrive; and it was probable that one at least of the two souls that were hovering on the balance would have winged its flight to the bright shores of eternity before the sun set. At eight o'clock Frank opened his eyes, and asked for something to drink. Captain Dynevor poured out some iced coffee, and handed it to him. Some was spilt on the white counterpane.

"How shaky you are, old fellow. Done too much riding?"

Fred's heart leapt. The eyes which looked into his own were as sensible as ever. He couldn't answer at first: joy is sometimes more overpowering than grief.

"Ah! Master Francie," said Margery, coming forward, with the tears running down her poor old cheeks; "you've given us a time of it, you have! But you've turned the corner now, haven't you, and you won't go back?"

"Not I."

"Drink this, Frank; you will want all your strength for what I am going to tell you," and Captain Dynevor this time poured some brandy into a glass, and insisted on every drop being drunk before he said another word. He could see an expression of great sadness returning to the face he had watched so eagerly through the long days and endless nights; and he could not shake off the fear that, with returning consciousness, the desire to die might also return; and the wish in Frank's weak state might soon work its fulfilment.

"Give him a wish to live," quoth the doctor, "and we may pull him through."

Acting upon this, Fred lost no time. Also, to do him justice, he was sincerely anxious that Lady Wolverton in spite of all the evil that she had worked, might receive the comfort of Frank's forgiveness before her death.

Kneeling down by the bed he stretched his arm along the pillow to support his brother's head; the two faces—so alike in feature, but so unlike in everything else, now that the one was worn by sickness, and haggard with care, whilst the other was still redolent of health, and burnt with Indian suns—were close together and the tears were in Fred Dynevor's eyes as he began to break the news, which he knew would affect the weak invalid, more than any thing else in the world.

"We've pulled well together, you and I, old man, haven't we? We've had mean moments together, and got out of them together, and we've scarcely had a hard word between us, from year's end to year's end." His voice grew husky, and his brown hand stole softly into the other's, which was white as a woman's, and so terribly thin. Frank's eyes were fixed upon his agitated face, big with suspense. "And we've always stood by one another through thick and thin; and your quarrels have been mine and my quarrels yours, and we've stuck to one another like bricks, and we've been as fond of each other as if we had been brothers instead of old chums, haven't we, old fellow?" A big tear rolled down his honest face on to the sheet, and his lips quivered.

"And—and!"—murmured Frank, his head beating fast.

"And now it seems so natural, doesn't it, to find it was all a mistake from the beginning; that we are brothers by birth as well as by love?"

"Brothers!" The feeble hand clutched his in intense eagerness; it seemed as if the fluttering heart had leapt into the eyes, as Frank raised his head, and fixed them on Fred's as if he would read his soul. "Good God! is it true?"

"True as Gospel; keep up, old boy! We are both Dynevors of Dynevor. Cry hurrah! to show you are not sorry."

His own emotion was so great that the tears were rolling down his cheeks, but he tried to laugh in order to carry it off. "Poor fellow! it's been too much for him," he said pitifully, as the weary head fell back upon the pillow, and the eyelashes drooped on the white cheeks. "Here, Margery, give me the brandy, quick!"

It was long before Frank revived. The joy of finding the dearest dream of his life realised, had been too much for him. He opened his eyes at last, reluctantly, feeling that the illusion would be dispelled at the first word or glance. But when he saw Mrs. Dynevor standing by his bedside, when she threw herself upon him, sobbing out: "My boy, my boy!" When Fred stood beside her with a smile upon his face, as if to say it was all true, then his happiness grew too great for words. The sudden consciousness that he was no longer an insignificant waif, without parent, home, or kindred, but a Dynevor of Dynevor, with the love of father, mother, sister, and brother, all waiting for him, and no longer in mistaken affection—came like a flood of joy to irradiate his whole future life.

His heart went up to God in sudden spontaneous gratitude, and then he looked in his mother's face, and said, with shining eyes:

"Am I forgiven?"

"Over and over again; Fred has explained it all. And in the joy of having two sons instead of one, the rest is forgotten. Oh, if your father were only here, this would be the happiest day of my life. Think of him, and of Alice," and with a sudden burst of maternal love she kissed his eyes, his cheeks, his lips. "And to think of the years that I have been without you, dear, life will scarcely be long enough to make it up."

"There is some one waiting for a last message for you, Frank, in the next room to this," said Captain Dynevor, bending forward. "What shall I say for you to Lady Wolverton?"

"To Lady Wolverton? Oh, she can wait till I am well enough to go and see her. Mother, dear, how soft your hand is," as he stroked it fondly.

"But she can't wait. She told me how she had wronged you; and she wants you to forgive her, that's all."

"I don't understand." A puzzled look came into his face. "She never did me any harm that I know of, only very substantial good. What on earth have I to forgive?"

"A tidy bit, I think," said Fred, grimly. "It is she who stole you from us, in order to break our mother's heart. It is she who made your boyhood miserable, and brought you to this."

"No; that sin was mine." A red flush rose to his brow.

"And now she wants you to say you bear no malice; just to make her comfortable before she dies."

"Is she dying, poor soul? Tell her that I forgive her from the bottom of my heart. I have been like a thorn in her side, for many a long year, and I think she wanted to make all right, some time ago, only she hadn't the courage; and one mustn't blame a woman for want of pluck," he said, slowly.

"Go to sleep now, or you will be exhausted," said Mrs. Dynevor, smoothing the pillow as Fred left the room.

"Then give me your hand to hold, mother, or I shall wake and think it's a dream;" and

with her hand clasped in his, he presently fell asleep, whilst Mrs. Dynevor sat by his side thinking of that miserable day four-and-twenty years ago, when they told her that her baby was dead.

Captain Dynevor knocked at the door of the next room. It was opened by a gentleman, whom he presumed to be Lord Wolverton.

"What do you want?" he said, gruffly.

"To see Lady Wolverton, if I may."

"Then you can't." She is too ill to know you or anyone else."

"She could not know me, I am a stranger; but I—"

"You are Francis Dacre, though Heaven knows whether you have more right to that name than any other," he said, insultingly. "I should know you anywhere, because of the plague and the puzzle you have been to me all my life."

"My name is Frederick Dynevor, and I have not the honour of your acquaintance," and the young dragon drew himself up to his full height. "The man whom you know as Francis Dacre is my twin-brother; and if you have anything to say against him, you can say it to me."

Lord Wolverton stared. "God bless my soul! What a likeness! I can't stay and talk to you now; but I should be glad of some conversation with you at another time. If I have seemed rude I ask you to excuse it, because of the trouble I am in." He was about to shut the door, but Fred stopped him.

"That trouble is my excuse for coming to you. Lady Wolverton came to my brother's room this morning, and implored him to forgive her for the wrong that she had done him."

"The wrong?" said Lord Wolverton, with a frown.

"Yes, the wrong. To speak plainly," said Fred, determined to clear his brother at all hazards, "she stole him from my mother when he was a baby, and has brought him up under a feigned name—which I believe to have belonged to a distant connection of her own—ever since. This she confessed to me this morning."

Lord Wolverton turned pale, and leant his spare figure up against the doorway.

"Unfortunately my brother was delirious, and could not answer her appeal, so she went away heart-broken; and now I have come to tell her, from Frank, that he forgives her from the bottom of his heart. Surely such a message as that might ease her last moments."

"You can go in and try," said Lord Wolverton, gloomily, as he stepped aside to let him pass.

The room was dimly lighted with two gas-burners, turned down so low as to give only a flickering twilight. Lady Wolverton lay on the sofa with closed eyes. Her bonnet and cloak had been removed, but she was otherwise dressed exactly the same as in the morning. Her black hair, streaked with grey, lay in an untidy mass upon a red cushion which supported her head; her hands were clasped, and a shawl of yellow and black stripes thrown over her feet. A young woman, apparently her maid, stood by the table stirring some mixture in a cup, whilst old Margery leant over the head of the sofa, with her eyes fixed on the mistress whom she had served too well. It was evident that Lady Wolverton was sinking fast. Her breath came in fitful gasps, which shook her from head to foot.

"Leave the room," said Lord Wolverton, briefly, as he went to the chandelier and turned up the gas. The maid put down the cup and quickly obeyed—old Margery maintained her post. Roused by the sudden accession of light Lady Wolverton opened her eyes. As her glance fell upon the tall straight figure standing before her—a light broke over her face, and she held out her hands with a low cry.

Fred went a step forward and knelt down by her side. She turned her face to his with a fond, entreating gaze. That she had seen Frank that morning ill, and confined to his bed, had passed from her mind. She thought he was there close beside her, and she waited

breathlessly for him to speak. Her husband stood and watched her with a curious feeling in his heart.

"Frank forgives you from the bottom of his heart," said Fred, earnestly. "He remembers your kindness, and forgets the rest."

Her whole face quivered with emotion. "Kiss me," she panted. And doomed to be mistaken one for the other, Fred gave the embrace which was asked of Frank. "Thank God!" she murmured, brokenly; "if man forgives, surely there is mercy in Heaven;" and with a sigh of infinite content the weary woman said good-bye to the troubles of earth, thankful that the hour of release had come.

Dynevor was electrified by the news that Francis Dynevor, who was—according to popular belief—buried long years ago in the family vault in Greystone churchyard, had come to life again, and was as tall and good-looking a young fellow as any girl might wish to see. The Squire got out of bed, and absolutely refused to be treated any longer as an invalid. It is probable that he would have started for Southampton without waiting for the doctor's leave, but Alice held on to his coat-tails, and declared her intention of never letting go. Madge was so upset that she kept dark for a whole day, and avoided all confidences with her cousin and confidante. Sir Jasper said he saw the difference all along, but he didn't like to mention it, as his sister seemed satisfied. Anyhow, Frank was an impudent young jackanapes, and he was very glad that Madge had kept him at a distance; which remark showed him not to be quite so wide awake as he pretended.

The joy-bells rang in Greystone as a large open carriage dashed through the village up the long beech avenue to the wide open doors of Dynevor House. The twin-brothers stood side by side in the large old-fashioned hall, and Alice looked up at them shyly, not knowing which she had kissed as a stranger. But two moustaches, instead of one, were thrust into her face, whilst both the Squire's hands were grasped tumultuously, and Mrs. Dynevor began to cry, because she was so happy.

Frank's deception was glossed over by kind and loving sympathy. They said it was a case of the craving of natural instinct overcoming conventional propriety. And Madge, whenever the matter was discussed before her—which rarely happened—vowed that it was all her fault from the beginning, because she refused to believe him when he told her the truth. As to Frank, he could not be quite satisfied till he had decoyed her into a quiet corner on the terrace, and made up for that very unsatisfactory parting under the thorn at Vivian. With his arm round her waist, and her small head resting on his shoulder, he told her that he had loved her from the first; but now that he had been so wicked he could not dare to hope that she would have him.

"You couldn't forgive me, darling, could you?" he said, with his handsome face in dangerous propinquity to her own.

And she softly said, "I could."

So we may leave them on the threshold of their happiness, with no cloud in the future to mar their present joy. Surrounded by the good influences of those at Dynevor we hope that Frank will get rid of some of his heterodox notions, and whilst repenting of his weakness in the past, learn to rest on another strength than his own.

Old Margery must not be forgotten. She ran away and hid herself in the small cottage where she had lived with "Master Francis." She was too proud to clear herself at Lady Wolverton's expense, or else she might have told of the pressure which that lady had brought to bear on a mind bewildered by trouble. Frank found her in her retreat, and induced her to come back to keep house for her nephews in Greystone, assuring her that she, like himself, was to be included in a general amnesty.

TO THE WORLD GUILTY.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FATAL RESOLVE.

Two letters were handed to Hyacinth as she sat alone one morning; one she knew was from Lady Loring; the handwriting of the other she had never seen before. She opened Lady Loring's letter first, and a quick flush of pleasure rose to her cheek, and her heart beat faster. It was an invitation to Bramblemere for the autumn. Then she opened the other letter, and instantly the colour deepened, but the pencilled brow contracted in pain. In a few earnest words Hazlemere asked to see her again—to be allowed once more to plead his cause. The girl's eyes filled with tears; but she set her lips firmly, and at once wrote a reply, declining the request—gently, but decidedly. An interview could only, she said, bring needless suffering to both; her answer had been final; nothing could change her feelings, and to grant the request could only be to hold out a hope which had no foundation.

She had just finished the address of this letter when the door opened, and Gwendolen entered. Hyacinth did not attempt to hide the letter; she thought it just as well, indeed, that her cousin should know the truth. Gwendolen came up to the table, and her glance fell on the letter. She started, and looked inquiringly at Hyacinth. Hyacinth met the look clearly, though with a heightened colour, and said quietly,—

"You wonder why I am writing to Mr. Hazlemere? He wrote to me first, asking to see me, and I have declined—that is all."

"Declined! But Hyacinth, pardon, has he—has he spoken to you already?"

"Yes." The violet eyes drooped, the sweet voice sank very low. "I am so sorry—so very sorry—for him; I never let him to think I cared for him at all. Gwendolen, it was not my fault."

"No, dear, I know it was not your fault." Gwendolen paused. Was Hyacinth, then, heart-free, or—she laughed a queer little laugh—and said, sily,—

"Perhaps his Grace of Merivale would have better fortune, Hyacinth?"

"Oh, no," Hyacinth answered, "I care nothing for him."

"Take care you are not like the Indian girl and the corn, Hyacinth."

"I am not yet eighteen, Gwendolen. Why should I be in such a hurry to fall in love?"

"Aye," said Gwendolen, bitterly, "you have plenty of time. As to Hazlemere, I do not pity him. He is like all men—fickle; he has met his punishment. By the way," with affected carelessness, as if the whole matter had made little impression on her mind, "I have been asked down to Larchfield for August, but I have declined—they are such dull people."

"Where are you going then, Gwendolen?"

"I don't know yet. Have you any invitation?"

Her cousin's strategies were very simple to Hyacinth; she answered,—

"An invitation has just come from Lady Loring, and I shall accept it."

A quick movement on Gwendolen's part; then she said in an altered tone,—

"They are going to have a house full, are they not—including the Earl of Lochisla?"

"Yes—some very nice people."

She drew paper towards her to write the reply to Lady Loring. Gwendolen began playing with a paper knife, and presently said slowly, "I wish Lady Loring had asked me, too, Hyacinth."

Hyacinth started and looked up.

"Gwendolen! you would go?" she said, involuntarily.

"Why not? Should I object for his sake? Has he been so thoughtful for me?"

"No, no; but for yourself—your own sake—it would seem so strange."

"Stranger things have been done. But Lady Loring, who used to be a friend of ours, casts us aside for Lochisla. Louis would not meet

him; and he—no doubt, my lady thinks—may fall in love with Emma or Clarice Loring. Yet I wonder, if that is her idea, that she asked you."

"Do not speak so, Gwendolen."

"I don't want to pain you, Hyacinth. Never mind what I said just now, will you? As to the Earl, do you suppose if I went to Bramblemere by any chance he would leave?"

"That would depend, I should think, upon how he thought you felt. It might be better to remain; it would, perhaps, make your position painful, if not unbearable, if he left; for whatever excuse he made everyone would know why he did so. But I think Lady Loring could hardly ask you, Gwendolen. It would be bad form!"

"Not necessarily," returned Gwendolen, impatiently; "not if—" She broke off abruptly, and crossing the room, sat down and took up a book, and did not speak again till Hyacinth's letter was finished and despatched to the post. Then, as the girl was about leaving the room, her cousin called her back.

"Hyacinth, come here, I want to ask you something."

Hyacinth went up to the low chair in which Gwendolen was sitting, and paused by her, looking down in deepest pity on the flushed face which was drooping now, while Gwendolen's restless hands were twisted in and out among the cords of her long girle.

"What is it, Gwendolen?"

"You remember—still not looking up—what I said to you once about Lochisla—that if I could I would bring him to my feet?"

"Yes, I remember."

"You condemned me for that—you who had not suffered as I have suffered. But Hyacinth, what if—what if—the old love is not dead?"

"Gwendolen, are you speaking of yourself?"

"Of myself first—then of him."

Hyacinth was silent a moment. She knew that her cousin was not speaking the truth when she said that her love for Errol Cameron still lived. It was difficult to answer such words—words which, if true, should never have been uttered.

"You know your own heart, Gwendolen," she said, at length; "but what I thought before I think still."

"Aye, aye! you have not loved. Pride is so easy where there is no love; yet he would scarcely dare to seek me, Hyacinth." She caught the girl's hand in her own, and looked up eagerly into the beautiful face. "Do you think he loves me still?"

"Why ask me that question?" said the other, recoiling; "how should I answer for him?"

"He sees you—speaks to you. Besides, a look—a tone—"

"Word—look—tone—would be a trust, a confidence," Hyacinth interrupted. "Could I play the spy on the man who, be his sins what they may, has ever acted towards me like a true friend and chivalrous gentleman. You cannot mean your question to be answered seriously, Gwendolen."

"Why not? It is you, I think, who were born in Arcadia—not me, as you suggested the other day. Do not people every day tell each other what they collect from the language or looks of this one or that?"

"Yes, Gwendolen; but each case must be judged on its merits, and an honourable mind should know where to draw the line. Would you have me repeat to Count Errol—suppose that he sought such a confidence—many things you have said to me, or even what looks or inadvertent words may have given me to understand?"

Gwendolen bit her lip.

"No; but that is different. A woman's confidence—distinctly given or implied—should never be betrayed."

"Nor, I think, should a man's."

"I don't ask you to betray confidence," said Gwendolen, sharply.

"Pardon! Then there is nothing more to be said, but it seemed to me that you did."

"Because you take, or affect to take, so ex-

travagant a view of what is honourable. You would be sorry, doubtless, to think that Errol Cameron's thoughts were still mine."

A haughty flush crossed Hyacinth's face.

"I am sorry," she said, turning away, "that you stoop to use base weapons, Gwendolen. To attribute to others unworthy motives is generally the resource of the mind that is most readily swayed by them."

Her hand was on the door as she spoke. Gwendolen coloured scarlet—hesitated a moment—then sprang forwards.

"Hyacinth, I was wrong—vexed—forgive me!"

Hyacinth was touched at once, despite a certain sense of insincerity in her cousin's still

"Why should we quarrel, Gwendolen?" she said, gently.

"It is not your fault, Hyacinth, it is mine—I forgot myself!" She bent forwards and kissed her cousin's soft cheek, and so there was peace again. But Hyacinth knew that the demon of jealousy was not laid, and that Gwendolen would move heaven and earth to obtain an invitation for Bramblemere, in the wild, mad hope of regaining Lochisla's allegiance.

If Hyacinth could only have spared her that miserable self-deception! But her promise to Errol Cameron bound her, and she could not ask to be released from it without betraying Gwendolen's confidence.

Besides, though she grieved for her cousin, it was mere because Gwendolen so sacrificed her womanly dignity. It was impossible to have any respect for the motives that influenced her.

Meanwhile Hyacinth counted the days to the period of at least a temporary release from a painful thralldom. Strive as she would she was conscious that her manner, to Louis, was not always exactly what it had been before that night of the Embassy ball; and she knew that Louis noticed some difference in her, and it only added to her unhappiness to think that he, perhaps, misinterpreted her, and attributed any change in her to a consciousness of a change in her own feelings towards him.

She lay down every night dreading the morning, and all her old pleasure in her cousin's society was gone. She loved him the same, even more; for there was an added pity, a still deeper sympathy. And many bitter tears Hyacinth shed when alone for the suffering she had not fully caused and was powerless to assuage; but the sweet peace, the confidence she had once felt could never be hers again. And whereas she had once been so happy in Louis's society, she was now only glad to escape from it, whenever she could do so without exciting remark. How often she sighed for the old glad days, in the camp with Lochisla—how often she wished that she had never come to England! She seemed now to be walking in shadows, among which only one light glowed—Lochisla's great love for her. But was even that love hopeless? Would a day come of eternal severance? Ah! no, no—that could not, should not be. She belonged to him, and he was hers; shame and dishonour unmerited could not part them. Patience! The cloud might pass away; but if not, then Errol Cameron must take her to his heart, for to her he was spotless. No hand of man—not even his own—should thrust her from him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"So, Hyacinth, Gwendolen tells me you are going to stay for a time at Bramblemere?"

Hyacinth started as Louis spoke. He had just come into the morning-room where she was copying music, while Miss Philippa sat at the other side of the table engaged in some fancy work.

"Yes," the girl answered, hardly glancing up; "I meant to have told you myself, but I did not know you were in."

She wondered if Gwendolen had told him also about Hazlemere. Louis said,—

"I have not been long in. Are you pleased to go to Bramblemere?"

"Why, yes; there are some nice people there. I daresay I shall enjoy it."

"More than if you remained with us, Hyacinth?" trying to speak lightly.

Hyacinth wrote down two crotchets and a quaver, and was silent. Miss Philippa glanced from her to Louis—who had grown very pale—and back again, and set her lips together. Had Hyacinth no eyes to see, she said to herself? Was she treating her cousin as she had treated Herbert Hazlemere?

"Count Cameron," she said, sorting out a shade of silk, "is to be among the guests. I should have thought, Hyacinth, that you would scarcely care to meet him in the almost home-like association of a country house."

"I knew I should meet him, Aunt Philippa," spoken very quietly.

Louis interposed rather quickly,—

"Shall you be at Bramblemere long, Hyacinth?"

"No, I think not—a week or two, I believe." Louis turned, and without another word quitted the room.

Hyacinth felt her heart sink like molten lead. She dared not look after him; she tried to go on with her work; but she did not know what she was doing, and blindly put quavers for minims, and crotchets for quavers.

Suddenly Miss Philippa spoke, laying down her work,—

"Hyacinth, how long is this to go on?"

The girl lifted her head now, her blue eyes blazing.

"How long is what to go on, Aunt Philippa?"

But Miss Philippa had resolved to "speak her mind," and dashed in medias res.

"You know well what I mean, Hyacinth. You know your power, and you use it cruelly. Herbert Hazlemere sought Gwendolen; he turned to you, you allowed him to throw away his affections upon you, and then rejected him. You are treating others in the same way; and Louis, you must know, does not regard you as a sister. Yet you trifle with him, and recklessly, if not wilfully, throw yourself into the society of Lord Lochisla—a man without principle—who has glamourised the world, and it seems he has glamourised you, into condoning his shameless treason."

Hyacinth had risen to her feet, and, folding her arms on her bosom, listened to this extraordinary and unexpected attack as if she thought the speaker deranged. When Miss Philippa came to a pause as abrupt as the commencement, the girl spoke in a low clear voice,—

"You prefer a strange indictment, Aunt Philippa. I did not know that I had 'trifled' with Herbert Hazlemere, or with any man. But such accusations are not worth refuting. As to my cousin Louis, I know now that he loves me as I never have loved him and never shall. He would not accuse me as you have done; he is too generous—too just! How would you have me act? Is it for me to speak, or for him? Well, never mind. In a few more days I shall leave this house, and I shall never return to it. I would have left it before, if I could; now I have no choice."

Miss Philippa felt as if the earth had opened under her feet. She had made a terrible mistake, and now, too late, trembled at the consequences.

She sat speechless, and Hyacinth, after watching her for a moment with some scorn in her face and mien, said, quietly,—

"I know why you received me, Aunt Philippa. I was not deceived; you did not like me; you perhaps even disliked me. I do not charge Louis and Gwendolen with sharing your feelings. I know they did not. But I will shelter you if I can, though you do not deserve it. I will do nothing, if I can help it, to cause more unhappiness, for I have caused—all unwillingly—so much already. I shall be going to Bramblemere very shortly, and after that I do not know what my movements will be, only that I shall not return to Louis Stanhope's house."

She opened the door and passed out, leaving Miss Philippa still unable to speak.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SUCCESS THAT HAD BETTER HAVE BEEN FAILURE.

THE days seemed to drag on wheels of lead to the end of July. There were balls and operas and concerts, and Hyacinth went out a great deal, glad to escape from Louis's society, or to be in it in the publicity of crowds. And, meanwhile, Gwendolen had not been idle. She had set her heart upon being, at whatever cost, among the circle at Bramblemere; and Lochisla's absence from London just at this period enabled her to draw nearer to the Loring. One day, after she had been riding with Emma Loring and Mrs. Sandon in the Row, Hyacinth accompanied the sisters to the opera, and after the first act Helen said,—

"Hyacinth, I want to ask you a question. Of course you will answer it or not, as you choose."

"Yes?" said Hyacinth, wondering what was coming.

"It is about your cousin, Gwendolen, and I only ask it in her own interests—you understand?" At least, the question is not altogether about Gwendolen; it concerns two other people—Sir Louis Stanhope and Lord Lochisla. 'Tis just this. I can trust both your intellect and your secrecy. Gwendolen was with us on the Row to-day, and the conversation naturally turned on autumn visits—an awkward subject, wasn't it? For mamma would of course have asked her to Bramblemere if it had not been that Lochisla would be there; but it was Gwendolen who commenced, and, as it seemed to me, with a purpose. I gathered from what she said—nothing direct, you know, of course; but hints and things implied, and so on, that—well, to speak plainly, she would forgive Lord Lochisla if he would allow her, and that if mamma asked her to Bramblemere she would not refuse the invitation. Now, you see, we are rather in a dilemma. Mamma could not ask Gwendolen if by so doing she would make Lochisla's position painful. What are we to do? what do you think? You know the Earl so well—you may know, perhaps, how he would feel in the matter, or you could sound him. He will be in town in a few days."

Hyacinth, who had listened to the above words in pained silence, did not speak for several moments. She could not reply without some consideration. She had no ostensible right to interfere between Gwendolen and her wishes, however unworthy of respect those wishes might be; and such interference might easily mean the appearance of a sentiment of jealousy towards Lochisla's former betrothed. She could not well take upon herself to answer for the Earl. One thing she knew—that he certainly would not quit Bramblemere if Gwendolen went there, because the very fact of her doing so would show that she had no desire to avoid him, but rather the contrary; and to withdraw himself would be a rebuke and a reproach to her, and make matters in every way worse than quietly taking the cue from Gwendolen, and letting bygones be bygones. It was the instinct and earnest wish of Hyacinth's generous nature to smooth over in Gwendolen's conduct which Helen Sandon and Emma must needs, like herself, have condemned, but were too well bred and kindly to comment upon to Gwendolen's own cousin. Hyacinth answered,—

"You are right, I know, in what you think of Gwendolen. If you and Lady Loring are so kind as to chime in with her wishes I know Count Cameron would not leave Bramblemere. He could not—as a gentleman—for that would be to tell Gwendolen she should not have come, and to reproach his hostess for asking her."

"Why not ask Gwendolen? and never mind society or anybody else," said Emma, who was inclined to be unconventional. "People would say mamma was a match-maker and peace-maker, that is all."

"Verbum sap," said Helen, laughing. "Well, mamma can but ask Gwendolen, and she can refuse if she likes; but after what she said to-day she cannot think I had power to give the invitation."

So the matter was settled. But what would Louis say?

Hyacinth was not long left in doubt. Two days later she was practising in the drawing-room—where she had been for the last three hours—when the door opened abruptly, and she started and looked round to see Louis, white with passion. She knew then, and rose.

"Louis, what is it? What has happened?"

But he could not speak for a moment. He sank down in a chair, pressing his hand to his forehead, and trembling violently. His physical strength never could bear the strain of strong emotion. Hyacinth laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Dear Louis," she said, involuntarily, but trembled in her turn, as he reached up and clasped her hand in his own. Yet she did not move or seek to draw it away.

"Bear with me a moment," Louis said, after a pause, "I am so weak—weak than I thought. I shall be able to say more shortly."

"Not yet, Louis. Let me fetch you some water."

He shook his head.

"No, dear, thanks; I am better already. That is your doing, sweet cousin. Hyacinth, I came to you, for I cannot say all I think and feel to Gwendolen—you may divine, though you may not have seen what she is when in a passion, and I cannot go through a scene. Did you know that she was going to Bramblemere?"

"Has she been asked, Louis?" asked the girl, trying to fence a little.

"Not an hour ago a letter came from Lady Loring. Gwendolen answered it; then she rose and quietly told me she had been asked to Bramblemere, and was going. I could hardly believe her at first: 'Going to Bramblemere,' I repeated; 'when Lochisla will be there?' She answered, defiantly, 'Why not? Why should I shun him? Let bygones be bygones; let the world think that I remember the past too little to bear malice.' I hardly knew what I said then, Hyacinth; my brain seemed on fire—that she should so stoop! Ah, Heaven! it maddens me! I know I told her that she must have sought the invitation, for Lady Loring would never have asked her to meet Cameron of Lochisla if she had not known that the invitation would be welcome. Whatever I said she did not answer me; she went straight out of the room. Hyacinth, how is it?"

Hyacinth turned aside, and her breast heaved. She was silent.

"Hyacinth, answer me!" Louis continued, passionately. "Surely he can have had nothing to do with it? It cuts me to the soul that she should so humiliate herself—should stoop to seek the man who has so foully wronged her. What must she seem in his eyes? What can the world think of her? She does not love him still?"

"No, Louis," spoken very low; "but—but she would win him if she could. Hush! hear me," as he started, and seemed about to speak again. "Be gentle with her, Louis; you cannot know all she feels, and nothing you can say or do will alter her will. You ask if Lochisla has anything to do with it; so much I can answer you—no. Be just to him, Louis; whatever wrong he has done, he is not what you think him. If he loved Gwendolen still, if he desired a reconciliation, he would not act in the manner you impute."

"How can I trust him, Hyacinth, and how can you—knowing what you know?"

"I know him far better than you do, Louis," said the girl, steadily. "But let that pass. He does not need any defence from me. I know that what I say is true, and no one's belief or doubt can alter that. Yet even if he had anything to do with Gwendolen's determination to go to Bramblemere, what could you do? She will not listen to you; as to Lady Loring, she can only think she is acting for the best. She no doubt imagines that Count Cameron may not be sorry for the opportunity to blot out the past."

"It can never be blotted out," interrupted Louis, vehemently, "unless it be explained and atoned for."



[UNDER SUSPICION.]

Hyacinth's heart swelled, but she was silent. Louis added more calmly,—

"Has Gwendolen spoken of this to you, Hyacinth?"

"Dear Louis, forgive me; I must not answer you no, but beyond that my lips are sealed, for I should betray confidence if I spoke."

"Pardon the question," said Louis, looking up quickly into the beautiful face; "but—so much may I ask? If not do not reply—did you try to dissuade her?"

The girl started and coloured crimson.

"How could I say much?" she answered, turning aside.

"True, true!" The young man bit his lips. "Shame and grief have blinded me, Hyacinth. No, you are hard-tied, but I am not."

"Louis—oh, pardon! but if you argue with her it will only make misery; she will not yield."

Louis had half risen; he sank back irresolute, yielding instinctively to the stronger nature. After a moment he looked up again to Hyacinth's face, and drooped his eyes again as he said, slowly:

"Are you pleading for Lochisla?"

"Pleading for Lochisla?" the girl repeated, wonderingly. "What do you mean, Louis?"

"I mean, do you know or think that he loves Gwendolen still?"

Would he not have rejoiced to hear her answer, "He loves her still"? But she clasped her hands together, and wrung them with a passionate gesture.

"Ach, Himmel!" she burst out; then sternly controlling herself, said with an abrupt transition to a manner almost cold, "Count Cameron's secrets are his own, Louis. Whether he told them to me or I divined them, they would be equally a trust, and I could not betray them." Then, fearing she had pained her cousin, she said more hurriedly, with that sweet wistful manner that had so fatal a charm, "You will bear with me, Louis. You are not angry with me?"

"Angry with you, Hyacinth?" The passion in his voice struck her with a sudden tremor

and made her draw back. "No, no," he said, softly, "never, angry, nor even vexed with you, dear Hyacinth, sweetest counsellor."

He held out his hand, and Hyacinth gave him hers, and suffered him to draw her to his side again, but he only held her hand, and seemed anxious just now to put a guard upon himself, and did not trust himself even to look at her; but in the touch of her hand there was strength, and he needed it.

"Can nothing, then," he said at length, "be done to turn Gwendolen from conduct so unwomanly—so humiliating to herself—to her name?"

"I am afraid not, Louis; and I would not let Aunt Philippa speak about it. Quarrels are useless if they gain no definite end. They only make unhappiness, and cause estrangement. You would not cast Gwendolen off: she is your sister, and even if you did not love her there is the inevitable world to consider. And people are not bound to believe that she is actually seeking to be reconciled to Count Cameron. There will be many guests at Bramblemere. One is Sir George Flemynge, who showed Gwendolen a good deal of attention at Mrs. Sandon's garden-party only last week. Why should not Gwendolen be thinking rather of him than of Count Cameron? Not unwilling, too, to show a man who abandoned her how little his conduct affected her. Say that such feelings are unworthy, they would not mark Gwendolen out from others. Half the women in society seem to have no other thought than looking after a rich husband, and no one thinks the worse of them for it."

Hyacinth's reasoning was at once conciliatory and good. Her words fell like oil on troubled waters; the mere sound of her silvery sympathetic voice had a charm for Louis. He grew insensibly calmer, as a sick man tossing in the delirium of fever is soothed by sweet music or the voice of one dearly loved. His head drooped; the tears rushed to his eyes.

"Sweet peacemaker!" he whispered, falteringly, and pressed his lips to the hand he held, "your wish were enough for me; but when you plead so tenderly a heart of stone could not resist, and a lion's fury must turn to meekness. I will be silent, then. I cannot do more than this. I cannot seem to countenance Gwendolen; all that I can do I will do. I do not think"—he smiled a little bitterly—"that my displeasure will affect her very deeply, so long as it is not expressed in act or language."

He rose once more.

"I must go to Aunt Philippa now, Hyacinth, lest she should see Gwendolen first, and learn something from her. I am glad I came to you, dear."

Hyacinth bent her eyes to the ground to hide the bitter tears. She could have wept aloud for him, he looked so ill and haggard; and she knew that not this grief alone—the grief of an hour—had wrought that change in him; nor was it his failing health only, but the sorrow which that failing health entailed. She knew why his love remained unspoken; how could he ask this bright, glowing life to link itself to his shattered life? Besides, was it growing on him that she could not give him the love he would seek? The girl's own passionate words to Miss Philippa, that she would never return to this house, seemed to recoil upon her now. Louis knew nothing of them; she seemed to be deceiving him while she kept her decision from him; and yet it was impossible to tell him, because she could not tell him why that decision was made.

Louis's lips trembled as he bent over his cousin's hand and kissed it. He did not kiss her brow as he usually did; but he said no more—perhaps he dared not. He simply turned away, and quitted the room. Alas for Gwendolen Stanhope! blindly courting an awful fate; dreaming foolish dreams, to wake to a grim reality!

(To be continued.)



["I SHALL PUT YOUR DEVOTION TO THE TEST," SHE ANSWERED, GAILY; "GO AND ALTER THE TARGETS,"]

NOVELETTE.]

THE MYSTERY OF THE FIRS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was nothing either particularly pretty or picturesque about Mayverne Manor. It was simply a good, substantial, somewhat massive habitation, evidently designed by an architect whose ideas of beauty were subordinated to those of utility, and who did not feel inclined to sacrifice one iota of comfort for the sake of whimsical people who have weak leanings towards gables, and carvings, and stained-glass windows. Nevertheless, its interior was all that could be desired; the hall was large, the staircase of solid oak, black with age, and possessing wide, shallow steps that it was a positive luxury to ascend; and the rooms were, without exception, lofty and well-proportioned. But of all the apartments the house contained, the library, with its oak wainscoting and quaint old mantelpiece, and crimson curtains, was perhaps the pleasantest—at all events, it was the favourite of the Manor's young mistress, Dorothy Mayverne, who on this particular evening—about the end of August, but cold and raw enough to have been three months later—was sitting on the hearthrug in front of the fire, her head supported by a pile of cushions, and her left hand mechanically smoothing the fur of a kitten—a little ball of white fluffiness—that lay on her lap, while her eyes were gazing as intently into the flames as if life held nothing of more importance than those queer, witch-like profiles she was trying to decipher in the red glow of the coals, and as if there were no such things as complexions in the world.

Truth to tell, Dollie's complexion had never occasioned her much anxiety, for it seemed to be of a kind upon which exposure to wind and weather had no injurious effect—assuredly the

slight tinge of brown the sun had given it was rather an improvement than otherwise, for it lent her face a richness of colouring artists are fond of giving to their creations, and which harmonized well with the bright rose flush that generally lay on her cheeks, and the deeper carmine of her full, tender, sensitively-curved lips. Captious critics might possibly have found fault with those lips as to form, but no one could deny their capacity of expression or their exquisite mobility, and when they parted and showed two rows of whitely-even teeth, even her enemies—if she had had any—must have confessed the fascination that lingered in Dollie's smile.

Although very little daylight lingered, the curtains had not yet been drawn, nor had the candles been lighted, so that the room was in obscurity save that part of it coming within the radius of the fire glow, and of which Dollie herself—a slim little figure, wearing a dark cashmere dress, with delicate lace ruffles at throat and wrists—was the centre. By-and-bye she withdrew her eyes from the study of the incandescent coals, and glanced at the clock.

"Now, pussy cat, it's time that old daddy of mine were here; if he doesn't come soon I shall get in a temper and scold him!" she said aloud, bending her fair young face down to rub it softly against the kitten's. "He knows I'm all by myself, so he ought to make haste, oughtn't he, kits?"

"Kits" replied by a low purr that might have meant gratitude for the caress or anger at being disturbed from her nap, and then, lazily stretching herself, began to play with one of Dollie's loose locks that had escaped from its hairpins, and strayed across her arm. Her mistress drew it away, but did not decline the challenge, and when, five minutes later, the door opened and Squire Mayverne came in, he was just in time to witness the young lady who kept the keys and termed herself his housekeeper engaged in a game at play with the kitten, and displaying as much zest in the

amusement as if she had been nine instead of nineteen!

"Get up, you baby!" he said, coming behind, and catching her arms so as to lift her, "I wonder when you are going to leave off these childish tricks, and remember you are grown up, Miss Mayverne?"

"Not till I'm married, papa. You see, if I did, we should be awfully dull, you and I, shouldn't we?"

"I'm thinking your marriage is an event likely to be indefinitely postponed; you seem so very determined not to be pleased with any suitor who presents himself that they'll grow tired of coming after a bit, and you'll be an old maid, after all," said her father, seating himself in an arm-chair that Dollie had drawn close to the fire, while she slipped down on her knees beside him, and began rubbing her cheek against his hand, as, a little while earlier, she had rubbed it against the kitten.

"And shouldn't you be glad if I were? You know you would much rather I stayed with you for ever and ever, rather than that I was carried off by some young man who you would be sure to call a jackanapes! But I certainly shan't sacrifice my inclinations for your sake again, if you treat me so badly, and let me stay here all alone so long,"—pouting her lips, like a spoiled child—"Why were you not home earlier?"

"Because I fell in with Garston—Lord Westley's agent, you know—and we had a long chat on subjects that you would not be likely to find interesting—agriculture, &c. Then we began talking of Heatherstone Firs, and what do you think he told me?"

"That another ghost has been seen?" breathed Dollie, with wide open brown eyes and voice lowered to the pitch befitting such a weird suggestion.

"No—something much more surprising."

"Lord Westley is coming to live there?"

"No, but you're somewhat nearer the mark this time—he has sold it."

"Really! Who can have been foolish enough

to buy such a dismal old place, full of all sorts of apparitions and horrors as it is said to be?"

"Someone who has more sense than to believe in such things, I expect—a man named Musgrave, who it seems has been travelling on the Continent for a long time, and now intends settling down as a country gentleman. Garston could tell me no more about him than that he purposes coming down as soon as the repairs are finished. Of course there is a great deal to be done before the house may be considered habitable."

"I should think so, seeing it has been empty for nine or ten years," said Dollie, thoughtfully; "shall you call on this Mr. Musgrave, papa?"

"I have not made up my mind; perhaps before there is any necessity for doing so, I may hear something more of him that will help me to a decision. I suppose your curiosity is on the *qui vive*?"

"Well, I do feel rather inquisitive about a man whose taste leads him to Heatherstone Fire," Dollie admitted, candidly. "But, I daresay, after all, he will turn out to be some stupid old personage, who will be of no use whatever, socially speaking, and perhaps have an equally stupid wife. By-the-by, did you hear if he was married, papa?"

"No, in point of fact, I didn't ask. What! are you already regarding him in the light of a possible suitor?"

Dollie laughed, but did not attempt to reply as she rose and led the way to the dining-room, keeping up the while, and during dinner, a continual stream of little silvery chatter, that seemed to diffuse a subtle atmosphere of youth and gaiety all around her. And indeed, this was one of the girl's great charms—she carried into everything she did such a brightness, such an exuberance of the rich vitality with which her veins were filled, that one thought as little of charging her with frivolity as of resisting her witcheries.

In the shooting season Dollie's life was rather dull; for her father—a sportsman to the backbone—showed a Spartan's hardihood in his contempt of wind and weather, and trudged over the stubble all day long, with his gun in his hand and a brace of dogs at his heels, thus leaving her a good deal alone.

Unfortunately, Mayverne Manor was rather at a disadvantage as regards neighbours, being nearly two miles distant from the nearest house—which was the Heatherstone Firs already mentioned—and which, with the exception of the Rectory, was the only habitation within walking distance. From different sources, Dollie learned that the repairs at the Firs were rapidly proceeded with, and in due time, that Mr. Musgrave and his household—which was stated to be a very limited one—had arrived, and domiciled themselves in their new abode, which was certainly not one it would have been deemed likely for a stranger to select as a residence.

Dollie looked at it rather curiously as she passed it one sunshiny morning towards the middle of September, when she was walking over to the Rectory—for all outward signs, save the smoke issuing from the chimneys, it might just as well have been tenanted still. Very little of the building, beyond the points of some gables, could be seen from the road; which skirted a plantation of firs, through which a gate gave access to a carriage drive leading up to the entrance. The only recommendation the place possessed was that it was very well situated, the scenery on all sides being as fine as any of the midland counties can boast—and that is saying a good deal. This morning the sunshine was pouring down in a wide bright radiance that brought out all the varied tones of colour with which early autumn had tinted the trees; on the distant hills there rested a thin veil of diaphanous mist that would by-and-by exhale itself into the sunlight, and nearer a silver gleam indicated where the beautiful Severn rolled its clear tide. The road Dollie was pursuing had more the character of a lane than a highway, for on

either side were tall hedges where dog-roses blossomed in June, but which was now tangled with briery and long straggling branches of blackberries. Dollie liked blackberries, and when Dollie had such an opportunity of gratifying her taste presented to her, she straightway took advantage of it, and climbed up the bank in order to get at the ripest, which, according to the fashion of this world's goods, were the farthest from her reach. This was disappointing, because the cottage children had rapaciously picked all those on the lower sprays; nevertheless, she made one more attempt, by standing on her toes and stretching out her arms, to reach a branch absolutely laden with berries that waved provokingly above her head. But it was unsuccessful.

"Let me help you," somebody said just behind her, and immediately an arm covered with grey cloth, and having a stick in its hand, was uplifted, and then the branch broken off and presented to her by a gentleman who took his hat off as she turned round.

Dollie was rather startled just at first, for the place was a lonely one, and the gentleman was a stranger to her. Moreover, the embarrassment was not lessened by the fact of his being young—certainly under thirty.

"Have I frightened you?" he said, with a smile that carried with it a certain sense of assurance; "if so, I am very sorry. I saw you struggling with this branch, and I could do no less than offer you my assistance."

"Thank you," Dollie answered, recovering her self-possession, and even feeling a little thrill of pleasurable excitement at the adventure. "I was rather surprised to hear a voice just here, because this lane is so very unfrequented that one rarely meets anyone, except children coming from school."

"It is lonely," he assented, not seeming to see that in order for him to get down the bank he must move—perhaps he did see it, but chose to ignore the fact so that he might have a few seconds longer to look at a picture which was in effect pretty enough to have furnished a theme for a pastoral idyll—a fair slim girl in a white serge dress, with a face delicately tinted like a flower, out of which two eyes, dark and liquid as the waters of some sunnied mountain tarn, glanced up at him with a curious mixture of frankness and reserve.

"I was going to the village," he added, "or rather, I should say, I was trying to find my way there, for, as a matter of fact, I am not yet at home in these localities."

"Perhaps I can direct you," Dollie said, with her pretty shy smile, and then, as concisely as she could, she explained to him the path he had better take over the fields, which would bring him to his destination more quickly than the road, and he, having no further excuse for lingering, bade her good morning and set out on the route she had indicated.

It is strange how often imagination acts as a magnifying glass, to increase the dimensions of events that are in themselves absolutely trivial! The simple fact of a stranger rendering a very small service had surely nothing in it to cause a glow of excitement to run through one's veins, or a flush of unwonted brightness to reddening one's cheeks, nevertheless both these phenomena occurred with Dollie, and as she went on her way through the dewy fields, her thoughts were busily occupied with the remembrance of that dark, eager vivid face that had looked up into her own—a face that had a shadow on it for all its youth. Of course she at once concluded him to belong to Heatherstone Firs, but he was so very unlike the portrait she had sketched of Mr. Musgrave in her own mind, that she thought he could not be the master of the house—perhaps he was a son, or a visitor.

Thus wondering, the walk to the Rectory did not seem as long as usual, and she was almost surprised when she caught sight of the long, low, ivy-covered house that was the home of the clergyman of the parish, the Reverend Charles Herbert. This gentleman can hardly be described as an orthodox parson; but in spite of various eccentricities his parishioners

liked him, and fully appreciated his easy condonement of many little offences that the former pastor of their souls would certainly not have let pass unreprieved.

Dollie was a favourite of his; in parenthesis he observed, most of his leanings lay in the direction of wealth, and generous Dollie had always her purse open when occasion demanded it, which was pretty frequently. He caught sight of her as she was coming up the path, and hastened to meet her with outstretched hands.

"My dear Miss Mayverne, I am very glad to see you; you are just in time for lunch!" was his characteristic greeting.

"I intended to be," said Dollie, laughing; "and see—" holding out her spray of blackberries—"I have brought you some dessert."

"Ah, very fine indeed—very pretty," remarked the Rector, absently, then laying his hand on the girl's arm he added, impressively, "I am going to surprise you; we have a visitor, a young man. Guess who it is."

A sudden colour flamed up into Dollie's cheeks, for at Mr. Herbert's words her thoughts immediately flew to the knight who had come to her assistance half an hour ago, but she did not say anything.

"It is my nephew, Sidney Champneys, of whom you have often heard me speak, and who came down yesterday," continued Mr. Herbert. "He is in the diplomatic service, you know, and has only just returned from Russia."

Dollie laid her blackberry branch down on the table as she passed through the hall, and Mrs. Herbert—a small, slight, faded looking woman who gave one the impression of going through life slipshod—noticed the unusually bright flush on her face, and attributed it to her walk. A young man had risen at her entrance from an arm-chair in which he had been ensconced, and now came forward to be presented, and Dollie, looking up rather archly, suddenly let her eyes fall with an expression of blank disappointment, for Mr. Sidney Champneys was slim and fair, and instead of the dark deep orbs she had expected to encounter, she met a pair of pale blue ones—handsome eyes too, but totally different to those others.

It is lucky for us our thoughts belong solely to ourselves, if it were otherwise I fear the world would not go on even as pleasantly as it does. Certainly Mr. Champneys' well cut patrician features might not have retained their wonted calm had he guessed the disappointment his appearance caused his new acquaintance, but as he did not, he placed a chair for her at the table and took his own, by her side, so that he might be able to attend to all her wants and entertain her with his conversation. I use the word "entertain," advisedly, for the art of talking had been studied by Sidney Champneys, and he had attained a proficiency in it that often stood him in good stead in his diplomatic capacity. Dollie's chagrin soon passed away, even the remembrance of it was drowned by her companion's light chit chat, that made the Rectory luncheon a very different affair to what it generally was. When it was over, they all adjourned to the garden, which was rather an extensive one, and possessed a good tennis lawn.

"You have come into the country at the right time of year, Mr. Champneys," Dollie remarked as they were walking together down a moss-grown path, the Rector and his wife following. "I think the trees look even prettier now than in the spring when the leaves are coming out."

"It's a long time since I have seen an English spring—four years," he said, thoughtfully.

"Four years! Weren't you getting rather homesick?"

"No. How should I when I have no home?"

"No home!" Dollie repeated, staring at him. "Do you mean you have no relatives?"

"None, except my uncle and aunt here."

The young girl was silent, although sympa-

thetic, and felt herself indulging a vague sentiment of pity for her companion's loneliness. An appeal to Dollie's sympathies was never made in vain, and perhaps Mr. Champneys was sufficiently shrewd to have discovered this already.

"Don't you play tennis?" he asked, breaking the pause as they came to the smooth, close-shaven lawn on which the net was set up.

"Oh, yes."

"Then let us have a game now."

They had several. Dollie and the rector playing against Mrs. Herbert and Sidney. The latter played well, but Dollie—lithe and agile as a young squirrel—played better, and contrived to gain an easy victory for her side.

"I confess myself ignominiously beaten," said Champneys, coming up to relieve Dollie of her racket, and to hand her a cup of afternoon tea that had been brought out. "Still some defeats are not bitter."

"I have never yet found them sweet."

"Nor I—till now. But, then, this is the first time you have been my adversary," he retorted, with a glance that gave emphasis to his words, and Dollie was glad enough to feel pleased at the compliment.

She paid a longer visit than usual to the Rectory, and was accompanied home by Champneys, who, however, would not come in, but promised to call the next day. He walked rather slowly and thoughtfully back to the Rectory, smoking a cigar with a meditative air, as if revolving some problem in his mind. When he had proceeded about half-way he was met by his uncle, and naturally enough the two men drifted into a conversation about Dollie.

"She is a pretty girl," remarked Champneys, with the air of one well qualified to give an opinion.

"She would be a pretty girl if she hadn't a penny to bless herself with, but considering her as a rich heiress one is justified in calling her a beauty," rejoined the Rector, drily. "You had better go in for her, Sidney."

"Well, yes, it wouldn't be a bad spec, would it?"

"The very best on which you could embark, my boy, for let me tell you plainly, I can't give you any help in paying these debts of yours. I am too hard up myself."

Certainly it would simplify matters a good deal if I could get a rich wife," said Champneys, meditatively. "I can't possibly go on in this way much longer. But I've tried that plan once before, and it didn't succeed, which makes me rather shy of venturing a second time. However, I'll think it over."

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK later Squire Mayverne and his daughter were quietly walking their horses along the same lonely road from whose hedge Dolly's spray of brambles had been reft. The hedges were just a trifle more gorgeous now in their wealth of colouring, and the gold of the leaves a shade ruddier, nevertheless they were less bright, for then the glory of the sunlight had been upon them, while now a leaden sky hung overhead, and dark clouds were coming swiftly up to the zenith. The Squire was looking up distrustfully.

"It won't be long before we have rain," he said, presently. "We had better make haste home before it commences."

"I don't think there's any fear yet," Dollie returned, "and I'm not at all anxious to get indoors—I love this lulling sort of quietude that precedes a storm, it always reminds me of Longfellow's pretty idea—

'Nature, with folded hands seemed there,
Kneeling at her evening prayer.'

But ain't you expecting Mr. Champneys to call?"

"Well, he said he might do so, perhaps."

There was a pause, the Squire looking rather furtively at his daughter, who was flicking the hedges with her dainty little silver-mounted whip as she passed them.

"That young man has not missed a single opportunity of coming to the Manor ever since he was first introduced to you!" he said, at length, and although some minutes had elapsed since either had spoken, Dollie was at no loss to guess to whom he referred. "What does it mean, Doll?"

"I don't know, papa."

"You don't, eh? Well, I think, old as I am, I could give a pretty good guess. I suppose it has never occurred to you that perhaps he might be coming to look after a wife? Such a thing is possible."

"Yes; it is possible," assented Dollie, gravely, looking neither to the right nor left, but straight in front, and before there was time to say more, a heavy drop of rain fell full on Squire Mayverne's nose.

"There! I told you how it would be," he exclaimed, triumphant at thus having his prediction verified, even though its fulfilment might be fraught with considerable personal discomfort. "Come," gathering up the reins and setting himself straight in his saddle, "we must put on the steam a bit."

They did put it on, and set out at a smart trot, but before they had gone very far a vivid flash of lightning rent the clouds, and was followed by a loud, reverberating peal of thunder. Dollie was riding a young and rather restive animal, and as the blinding flame flashed across his eyes he reared up on his hind legs and began plunging about in wildest terror, which seemed to communicate itself, although in a lesser degree, to the Squire's mare.

As a rule Dolly was a skilful and courageous horsewoman and seldom taken at a disadvantage, but she was a very coward at tempest, and had been considerably unnerved by the suddenness and unusual brilliancy of the flash, so that she had, perhaps, rather less control than usual over her horse. Be that as it may, she was unable to prevent him starting off at a gallop, so swift that no equestrienne less experienced than herself could possibly have retained her seat. As it was she swayed unsteadily from side to side, keeping a desperate hold on the reins, but unable to exercise the least guidance over the horse, whose terror seemed to increase.

Meanwhile the Squire was doing his best to quiet his own steed, and it was only when his daughter had galloped off, and he observed with what difficulty Dollie managed to keep in the saddle, that an idea of her danger dawned upon him, and he started off in pursuit—his heart turning as cold as if an icy hand had been laid upon it. He could see how the slight figure swayed backwards and forwards, every moment he feared to see it thrown violently to the ground, and strong man as he was, he trembled in each limb as he thought of what the consequences might—nay, must be; for there could be no doubt as to the result such a fall would entail.

Unfortunately the sound of his mare's hoofs in pursuit only had the effect of making the animal in front gallop all the faster, and it now became certain that unless some impediment should cause him to moderate his speed, Dollie's convulsive grasp of the reins would be insufficient to save her from the terrible fate that seemed to be awaiting her.

Involuntarily a deep groan escaped the Squire's lips. Oh, heavens! was it thus he must lose her—his only child whose young life promised so much; whose love had so entwined with his nature that to tear them asunder would be worse than death itself!

"Take my life, but spare hers!" was the cry that went up from the very bottom of his heart.

As for the girl herself, a sickness of despair had seized her as she became aware of her peril. She felt herself face to face with death, for she knew she could not hold on much longer, and only those who have been in a similar situation can properly estimate the dread and horror of that moment.

She was so young to die—the world was so beautiful, and she had been so happy in it, that Heaven itself seemed hardly capable of offering

her a more bounteous joy. Surely it would not be cruel enough to snatch her away just when life was pouring its richest gifts at her feet!

A blinding mist came before her eyes, the blood surged hotly to her brain, and a strange sort of rushing sound filled her ears, and then—then she became conscious that a man on horseback was in front of her, holding the bridle with a hand whose iron grip had made its owner known in far off lands, where he had tracked the tiger to his lair, had hunted and mastered the king of beasts himself across the hot Libyan sands, and under the drooping palm foliage of the tropics.

Afterwards she had a dim idea of a voice, sounding as if it came from a long way off, telling her she was "all right," and begging her not to be frightened, and then she felt herself falling forward—a strong arm holding her—and nothing else. Oblivion came, and Dollie fainted.

When consciousness was restored to her, she became aware that she was in a long low room, with windows opening on a lawn that she recognized as belonging to Heatherstone Firs; on the one side of her was her father, on the other an old lady with very white hair and blue spectacles holding a smelling-bottle in her hand, and in front a tall dark man with a heavy moustache who was gazing at her very anxiously, and under whose eyes her own fell shyly. She recognized him immediately as the gentleman who had reached down the blackberries for her.

"Do you feel better, my dear?" inquired the old lady, in a strangely sweet voice, tinged by an accent that declared her to be a foreigner, in spite of the purity and correctness of her English.

"I am well now, thank you," Dollie returned, raising herself and turning round. "Papa!"

"My darling," he answered, in shaken tones.

"Was it you who stopped my horse?"

"No, it was this gentleman here—Mr. Musgrave, and we owe him, in consequence, a debt of gratitude that I, at least, shall never be able to repay."

Dollie's colour rushed in a bright rosy wave to her cheeks; she looked up and Mr. Musgrave came a little nearer as if in response to a wish, muttered, on her part. She took his hand, and with an action that, by its perfect and complete simplicity, was robbed of the least tinge of affectation, raised it to her lips, saying, softly,—

"It seems very little to address ordinary words of thanks to you for such a service as you have just rendered me, but believe me, I am most deeply grateful. My life is very sweet to me, and you have saved it!"

"I only did what any other man would have done, given the occasion, he responded hastily and with an air of embarrassment, as if he deprecated the thanks. "I count myself the debtor of fate for having had the opportunity of serving you in any way," he added, in such a tone as took from the words all appearance of empty compliment, and then, as if desirous of changing the subject, he stepped on one side, saying, "Let me remember my duties as host now, and present you to my aunt, Madame Leclercq."

"I hardly think a formal introduction was needed," said the old lady, smiling; "as a rule these sort of accidents do away with etiquette. But my dear Miss Mayverne," as she touched Dollie's drenched habit, "you must be wet through! Pray come upstairs, and let me give you some dry garments to put on."

"And, meanwhile, I'll ride over to the Manor and bring back the barouche to fetch you," said the Squire; but to this proposal his impromptu host objected most vigorously.

"The rain is pouring down in torrents, and there does not seem to be the least prospect of its giving over," he said, looking out through the window at the lowering sky, in which nothing but heavy leaden clouds were discernible. "You have no alternative but to stay

and dine with us, and afterwards, if Miss Mayverne feels well enough to undertake the journey, I will drive you home in my dog-cart."

Thus it was arranged, and presently Dollie and Madame Leclercq came downstairs again, the former attired in a dark purple velvet robe, a great deal too big for her, which defect was partially remedied by its folds being drawn under a crimson girdle at the waist. Still, nothing could possibly have shown up the dazzling brilliancy of her skin, and the bright rose flush that coloured it, better than those sombre, but rich looking folds; and the Squire thought he had never seen his daughter look so pretty as she did this evening. The only visible effect of her accident was a certain tremulous shyness, as a rule foreign to her, but which was yet intensely charming.

"I was telling Mr. Musgrave that I trusted we should see a good deal of him in future," said the Squire, as he took a seat beside his daughter.

"Yes, and you too, madame," added Dollie to the elder lady, who smiled and shook her head.

"My health will not permit me to go anywhere, otherwise I would gladly avail myself of your invitation," she responded, with a sweetness that prevented the refusal from seeming ungracious.

"Don't you find this place very dull?" asked the Squire of Musgrave.

"It is rather, but I contrive to occupy myself so as to make the time pass tolerably quickly."

"But what on earth caused you to select such a residence as Heatherstone Firs—one of the loneliest spots you will find anywhere?" pursued the Squire, with the outspoken candour that was one of his characteristics.

"Because I wanted a lonely spot, I suppose. I am not one of those gregarious animals to whom constant intercourse with society is a necessity," rejoined Musgrave, coldly. And Dollie's womanly tact told her that the subject under discussion was not a pleasant one, although, on the face of it, it seemed one of the most natural that could have been chosen. She hastened to turn the conversation into a fresh channel.

"I had a strange sort of dream when I was first brought in here," she said to Madame Leclercq; "I opened my eyes and saw bending over me a lady with a quantity of golden hair, and one of the loveliest faces I have ever seen, but the effort of trying to speak to her must have been too much for me, and I lost consciousness again immediately. Was it not a curious fancy?"

Was it imagination on Dollie's part, or did Madame Leclercq really grow paler and exchange a startled glance with her nephew? He took upon himself to reply, and said calmly, and with a smile,—

"You were suffering from an hallucination—one of that kind that by its seeming reality defies analysis; or perhaps you saw my aunt's maid, who helped to restore you while your father and myself were out of the room. She has light hair."

Just then an old man entered to say dinner was ready, and they all adjourned to the dining-room—a large apartment illuminated with wax candles, that shed a soft and subdued light over it. All the appointments of the table—the silver, the glass, and the decoration were in perfect taste. The wines were such as to deserve the commendation of Squire Mayverne, who looked upon himself as a connoisseur. Everything indicated wealth, and yet the only servant to be seen was the old man who had summoned them, and who combined in his own person the duties of butler and footman. He was a foreigner, and spoke very little English.

Mr. Musgrave proved himself an excellent host. Young as he was he had evidently travelled much, and not only seen a good deal of the world, but had mixed in all classes of society, from the highest downwards. Moreover, he had studied mankind, and the result

seemed to have left in him a certain saddened bitterness that hardly appeared natural at his age. Once or twice when his remarks partook rather of a misanthropic tendency, Dollie ventured to contradict him, for she was a young lady who not only held decided opinions of her own, but also possessed the ability of expressing them pretty clearly when it pleased her, and her father was quite astonished at the brilliancy of her repartee.

After dinner, in compliance with Mr. Musgrave's request, Dollie sat down to the piano and sang such songs as she remembered without the notes—not florid Italian bravuras, with the air losing itself in a multiplicity of shakes and runs, but sweet old-fashioned ditties that our grandparents may have listened to, and which Dollie's fresh young voice invested with a wonderful charm. She blushed when Mr. Musgrave thanked her for her songs, and told her what pleasure they had given him, and the young man thought to himself that she had rather a trick of blushing, and that it was very bewitching, for nothing could possibly be prettier than the way in which the crimson blood surged up to her cheeks and mantled beneath the clear pure tinted skin.

The rest of the evening seemed to pass away quickly, and at about eleven o'clock the dog-cart was brought round to the door, and Dollie took her seat by Musgrave, in front, while her father mounted his horse and rode beside them. By this time the weather had changed, and instead of heavy clouds there was a clear purple sky above them, flaked over with a few pearl-tinted drifts, on which the moon was shining, and bathing the silent world in a flood of silver radiance that lent the landscape quite a different appearance to that it wore in the daytime. It shone, too, on Dollie's eyes and fair upturned face, and Paul Musgrave caught himself thinking what lovely eyes they were, and wondering if they owed their charm to the glamour of the moonlight.

CHAPTER III.

THERE! " said Dollie the next evening about six o'clock, as she stood in front of her looking-glass and gave one last pat to the thick bronze-coloured hair lying on her brow, "Now I think I shall do." Having come to this satisfactory conclusion she made a demure little curtsy to her reflection, and ran lightly down into the drawing-room where her father was waiting.

"Do I look nice, papa?"

"Hem! Well, so so," he returned, scanning the dainty little white-robed figure with considerable pride. "But where are the flowers Mr. Champneys sent you—the *stephanotis* he took such pains to procure?"

That was the very question Sidney asked himself when he and the Herberts came in. He looked at Dollie's attire from head to foot, but there was not a single blossom anywhere visible, and a certain expression came into Mr. Champneys' face, that, to anyone who knew him well, would have betokened extreme displeasure. However, he said nothing, but joined in the conversation that ensued, and that, naturally enough, turned on the adventures of yesterday. They were all, with the exception of their young hostess, discussing Mr. Musgrave and his strange choice of a residence, when he himself was announced.

After shaking hands with his guest the Squire proceeded to introduce him to the Herberts, but when he came to Champneys Musgrave started violently and drew back, his cheeks growing pale beneath the dusky bronze a tropical sun had painted on them. Sidney, for his part, seemed none the less disconcerted, and it seemed to Dollie, who was watching them, that an expression of actual fear came on both faces.

"So you know Mr. Musgrave already?" said the Squire, rather curiously.

"Mr.—a—Musgrave!" repeated Champneys, with a slightly satirical accent, while a cold smile curved his lips. "Oh! yes, we have met several times—abroad. But I certainly

did not anticipate a renewal of our acquaintance at Mayverne Manor."

"Fate plays us strange tricks, it never does to count too much on probabilities," said Musgrave, quietly, and turning round as he spoke, he began to ask Dollie if she had entirely recovered from her fright of the preceding day.

But Mr. Champneys was far from inclined to allow them to continue an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*, so he took up a position on the other side of the young girl, and retained it until dinner was announced, and the Rector came to offer his arm. This evening a little more ceremony was observed than there had been last, and Dollie and Mrs. Herbert retired after dessert, leaving the masculine quartette to their wine and the discussion of politics—a discussion in which neither of the younger men took part. Indeed they were both unusually silent, until, as they were crossing the hall to join the ladies in the drawing-room, Champneys laid his hand on Musgrave's arm, and under the pretence of pointing out a unique suit of armour, drew him into the recess of a stained-glass window.

"Have you taken up your residence here for a permanency?" he said, in a low voice, and looking round so as to assure himself there was no one near.

"As far as I can tell, yes."

"And—are you living alone?" he proceeded, meaningly.

Musgrave flushed a dark red, and he drew himself up with cold hauteur.

"May I ask what right you have to attempt an invasion of my private concerns?" he asked, disdainfully.

"I beg your pardon. I merely inquired for the sake of information. Of course it is your desire to keep up a strict incognito, otherwise you would not have changed your name?"

"Yes."

"But is this necessary? You can be under no apprehensions."

"I have my own reasons for it," said Musgrave, after a slight hesitation. "Reasons," he added, fixing his eyes meaningly on the other, "that I do not feel myself called upon to explain, but which I would impress upon you the necessity of respecting. I wish no one here to suspect my identity, and there is no one likely to betray it save yourself, so that if it should leak out, I shall know to whom I must attribute it. I have no desire to threaten, but in case you play me false, certain documents now in my possession will at once be forwarded to St. Petersburg."

"You need not fear," said Champneys, biting his lip so fiercely that the blood came. "The reason I wanted to speak to you privately was this. My friends, knowing I had some former acquaintance with you, will be sure to make inquiries as to its origin; what can I say?"

"Ah!" Musgrave laughed ironically, "I see, you are afraid of being dishonoured by my friendship—that is indeed a novel idea! Well, all you have to say is, that you met me at St. Petersburg. Will not that do?"

"It must, I suppose," returned Champneys; then he added in a lower and more embarrassed tone, "I need not tell you with what grief I heard of poor Olga's fate—"

"Do not take her name on your lips!" was the stern interruption, while a dark shadow swept across the speaker's bronzed face. "There are some subjects too sacred for you to mention, and this is one."

Saying which he turned on his heel, and left Champneys still standing in the embrasure of the window, looking gloomily forth into the darkness of the September night, with his brows knit together in an angry frown over eyes into which a strangely malignant expression had crept.

"So it is to be a battle between us again!" he said to himself, drawing his finger nervously down his moustache. Well, it has been none of my seeking this time, and if I make use of every weapon I have control over to compel the victory who will blame me?"

He stayed a few seconds longer to regain his self-possession, which had curiously deserted him during the latter part of this short interview, and then returned to the drawing-room—his brow as smooth, his voice as soft, and his manner as calm as if nothing had ever occurred to ruffle that polished serenity, that seemed so natural to him as to be actually part of himself.

Dollie was seated at the piano, idly turning over the leaves of some music, with Musgrave at her side, while the elder members of the party had already taken their places at the card-table, and were making preparations for a rubber.

"Oh, here you are!" said the Rector, as Sidney entered. "We were wondering what had become of you; come and take a hand at whist."

There was no help for it but to obey, so they cut for partners, and began their rubber, Sidney keeping a sharp look out meanwhile on the couple at the piano, who presently began a game at chess in which they became so absorbed as to preclude much conversation, for they were both good players, and Dollie never relished being beaten. She soon grew aware that she would have to submit to it though, for her opponent's skill soon left her in the background, nevertheless she kept bravely on, and at last, somewhat to her surprise, brought up her queen, and said, "Checkmate!"

"I acknowledge myself vanquished," said Musgrave, with a smile, as he rose. "You have gained a veritable victory."

"But such an one as I will not accept!" exclaimed the girl, quickly; "it was your last move that gave me the game, and I am sure it was made purposely."

"What! you prefer claiming defeat?"

"Yes, rather than win by unfair means."

"But everything is fair in love and war, and chess is to be looked upon in the latter light," put in Champneys, who was now released from the bondage of the card-table.

"I don't agree with that maxim," said Dollie, emphatically, "nothing can excuse unfairness."

"Not even love?" asked Sidney, exchanging a glance with Musgrave, who took up one of the chessmen, and was apparently engaged in examining its delicate workmanship while he waited for the answer.

"Not even love!"

CHAPTER IV.

As time went on the intimacy between the inmates of the Manor and Heatherstone Firs rapidly developed—that is to say as far as Paul Musgrave was concerned; his aunt, cared neither to go out or receive visitors, excusing herself on the plea of failing health. And the excuse was not an idle one, but was amply borne out by a terrible hacking cough that seemed to point to consumption.

The Squire had taken a great fancy to his new neighbour, and lost no opportunity of intercourse with him. Possibly this was due, in the first instance, to the debt of gratitude he owed him, but a more intimate knowledge of the young man's character had also its influence, for there were many points of sympathy between the two, different as were their natures. As a consequence, Musgrave was often at the Manor, and of necessity, was thrown a good deal into Dollie's society. A certain change—so subtle as to be rather felt than seen—had come over Dollie lately; she was not so lively as of yore, she was more given than ever to sitting in the dusk of the evening, watching those dream faces she saw in the fire, and weaving a hundred idle fancies into visions, of whose meaning she herself was hardly conscious. She knew in a vague sort of way that a new element had entered her life, and made it infinitely sweet; that her childhood had slipped from her for ever, and she had crossed the stream dividing the girl from the woman; but why this war, and by whom wrought, she shrank with maidenly self-deception from endeavouring to inquire.

And so September passed away, and brown October with its yellow tints and balmy air and rustling leaves came in, bringing with it, skies as blue as June's. Sidney Champneys still lingered on at the Rectory, contriving to find some pretence or other for coming to the Manor every day, and never missing a single opportunity for paying Dollie those delicate little attentions that his experience told him women usually found so acceptable. The young girl took them all in a very matter-of-fact way, neither refusing nor encouraging them, and Mr. Champneys—who flattered himself that he was a pretty good judge of feminine character—was forced, in this instance, to confess himself at fault, for it was a matter of great difficulty to guess what the girl's feelings really were. Regarding his own he had no doubt; Dollie's beauty and pretty coquettish ways, added to the charm of her wealth, made him determined to win her, let whatever obstacles would interpose.

"I will contrive to speak to her to-day," he thought, one afternoon, as he was riding slowly towards the Manor, whither he had been invited to a garden-party; one that Dollie had set her heart on giving, in spite of its being so late in the season. "They will be sure to ask me to stay the evening after the other guests are gone, and then I can easily find an opportunity. I hope that fellow Musgrave won't be there—hang him!"

But the subject of this uncomplimentary epithet was there, and more than that, was standing by the side of his young hostess—without, however, seeming to make any effort to engross her, or to pay her more attention than any pretty girl has a right to expect.

The scene Champneys saw, as, after dismounting and leaving his horse in the stables, he crossed the lawn, was a very pretty one. Although the autumn had so far advanced the day was lovely, and as warm as September, the sky was perfectly cloudless, and the sunlight fell in a soft mellow radiance on the changing foliage, bringing out its rich gold and ruddy tints, and turning to a mass of vivid crimson the Virginian creeper that covered the greater portion of the house. On the lawns several tennis courts were marked out, and the players in their white flannel dresses and bright hued sashes, flitting about, rackets in hand, made bright bits of moving colour on the smooth-shaven green. Rustic chairs and tables had been placed under the trees, and some of the guests had already taken their seats in the shadow of a magnificent cedar, and were drinking tea or coffee, or eating ices, keeping up the while a constant stream of light badinage and laughter, that showed Dollie had exercised considerable tact and discrimination in harmonizing her visitors.

"You are late," she observed, as Champneys came up and shook hands with her. "I quite counted on your aid in helping me to make up the tennis sets."

"Accept my humble apologies. I had some despatches by the morning post that I was compelled to answer. I need hardly add, nothing less than my duty would have kept me from your side," said Champneys, and the tone in which he spoke made Musgrave glance up sharply, while a faint increase of colour drifted into Dollie's cheeks.

"Then I shall put your devotion to a practical test!" she exclaimed, gaily. "They don't seem to be getting on very well with the archery over there; go and alter the targets for me."

"It is a test, for it debars me of your society; nevertheless, I obey," he said, and forthwith departed, mentally consigning archery to an unmentionable place, since it was the means of prolonging a *l'été-à-été* between Dollie and Musgrave that he had determined to interrupt. He had no further opportunity of approaching the young girl all the afternoon, for she was busy fulfilling her duties as hostess, and flitting about from one group to the other, looking like a human butterfly in her delicate blue cashmere dress with its lace trimming,

that was a *chef d'œuvre* of graceful drapery, and suited her to perfection.

At about six o'clock the guests began to depart, and as he had anticipated, Champneys was requested to remain to dinner—an invitation that the Squire also extended to Musgrave, who, after a slight hesitation, accepted.

Late in the evening they all went into the grounds, for the air was still quite warm, and a radiant flood of moonlight was bathing the landscape in the calm hush of its splendour. The Squire had linked his arm in that of Champneys, and presently, waxing eloquent concerning the merits of a fresh horse he had just bought, drew him towards the stables in order that he might make a personal examination of this paragon, thus leaving his daughter and Musgrave alone on the terrace.

"Let us go through the shrubbery," said the latter, after they had walked up and down two or three times, "that is to say, if you are not afraid of catching cold, Miss Mayverne."

Dollie disclaimed any such fear, and accordingly they made their way to the plantation at the bottom of the garden, where the moonlight was lying on the glossy laurel foliage, and the soft night breezes slipped whispering amongst the leaves that rustled gently in response.

"Miss Mayverne," said Musgrave, presently, "I am going to take a great liberty with you, and perhaps you will resent it, so I must begin by asking you beforehand to pardon me. It is concerning Mr. Champneys I wish to speak."

Dollie started slightly, and the colour that had come into her cheeks at the first part of his speech all faded away, leaving her very white, but she said nothing.

"It has struck me," went on the young man in a hesitating voice, "that he is approaching you in the character of a lover, and if this is really the case, I want to warn you against him. You may think me presumptuous and interfering, but I am willing to risk this for the sake of your happiness, which I am sure would be imperilled by a marriage with him. I know certain events of his career that fully justify me in saying this, but no motive less powerful than your welfare would have induced me to reveal even so much."

"You need not be afraid, Mr. Musgrave—there is not the slightest danger of my marrying Sidney Champneys," said Dollie, in a queer stifled voice, that made her companion glance down at her rather anxiously.

She was very pale, her sweet dark eyes held a half defiant, half pathetic look in their liquid depths, and her slim hands were locked tightly together in front of her, as if to help her in some self repression.

Musgrave came to a standstill.

"Have I offended you?" he asked anxiously, laying his hand very gently on her arm, and bending down his head so as to look in her face. "Heaven knows, I would sooner cut my tongue out than say one word to cause you pain!"

Dollie turned her head away, and a half sob broke from her—involuntarily, for she herself could hardly have explained her agitation, which seemed to communicate itself to Musgrave. He too grew pale, and his breath came very quickly.

"What is it, Dollie—*darling*!" he whispered, eagerly, for, strong man as he was, and completely as he fancied he had obtained the mastery over his emotions, he was yet not proof against the subtle influence of the sweet moonlit silence, and the presence of the girl whom—all unconsciously, even against his will—he had grown to love with a passion such as comes to men but once in their lives.

"Speak to me, dearest, and tell me what troubles you!" he exclaimed, and in another moment his arms were round her, and she was sobbing on his breast, while he poured into her ears eager assurances of love, the knowledge of which he himself had only just guessed, and which he had resolved should remain hidden in the recesses of his own heart. But

resolution is weak when opposed to passion, and he who counts on it trusts to a rotten reed that a touch will serve to break.

For those two, standing there in the silence of the night, alone with their love, and the moonlight hallowing everything it touched with its own beauty, life was at its best, for,

"Love took up the glass of time, turned it in his glowing hands,
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands."

CHAPTER V.

"I am going—most unwillingly—to ask a sacrifice from you, Dollie," said Musgrave, presently, when they had both grown a little calmer; "I want you to say nothing of what has passed between us for a little while."

"Not even to papa?" the girl asked, her lip quivering.

"Not even to him, dearest. I know this request sounds very strange, but, believe me, it is much harder for me to make than for you to grant, only circumstances are too strong for me, and force me to it. I cannot take back the words that have been spoken, and I fear I would not if I could, because they have brought me such intense happiness; nevertheless, I ought not to have uttered them, I ought to have hidden my love until I was in a position to demand your hand from your father, and intended to have done so, only in moments such as these one loses sight of all considerations of prudence. It will not be for long, Dollie, only a few weeks, and then I can claim you openly."

This was a very severe trial for the girl, and went a long way towards shadowing her newfound happiness, but Musgrave pleaded so hard, alleging the most urgent reasons for his request, that she at last yielded a reluctant consent. In truth she loved him with such an utter, soul-felt devotion, and trusted him so entirely, that she was easily persuaded he had a sufficient motive in desiring secrecy, and besides—here hot shamed blushes rose to her cheek—she felt the declaration of his affection had been made involuntarily, and partly through her own agitation, which had led him to guess her feelings.

Still, it was a great drawback to the joy she would otherwise have felt, but she eased her conscience by saying it would not be for long—in a week or two all necessity for silence would be over, and then she would ask her father's forgiveness.

The following day the Squire had to go to the county town to attend to some magisterial business which would keep him there till the next morning. He was accompanied by Mr. Herbert and his nephew; and it had been arranged that Dollie should spend the evening with Madame Leclercq, and stay at Heatherstone Firs until the next day. Early in the afternoon Musgrave came over to fetch her, and as they were walking together across the fields, Dollie said to him,—

"Do you know, I think you are prejudiced against Sidney Champneys, and judge him too harshly. I like him very much."

"Most women do, I think," he returned, drawing her arm through his, and gazing fondly down into her fair face. "Still, I have good reasons for my opinion."

"What do you know against him?"

"That I cannot tell you."

"I would keep no secrets from you," she said, a shade of wounded pride in her voice.

"And I would not from you, either, if honour did not compel me," he answered, earnestly.

She said no more, and the rest of their walk was accomplished in silence. When they reached the Firs Musgrave let himself in through a side gate with a key he carried in his pocket, and they approached the house from the back, intending to enter by a casement window that opened on the lawn. Just as they were stepping inside, Dollie paused and laid her arm on her lover's, at the same time motioning him to silence. A sudden flood of melody was borne out to them—a woman's voice, fresh and sweet and clear,

although not powerful, singing the "Casta Diva."

Musgrave's face flushed crimson, and uttering an exclamation of anger, he hastily crossed the room, and passed through the door without staying to give a word of explanation. Almost directly afterwards the singing ceased, and a few seconds later he re-entered the room, evidently in a state of some perturbation.

"I must apologise for leaving you, darling," he said, "but I really thought it was time to hint to Teresa that she was going too far in thus exercising her vocal powers."

"Teresa!" repeated Dollie, in the utmost astonishment. "Do you mean to say it was Madame Leclercq's maid who was singing?"

"Is it a matter of so much surprise? You know the lower orders are frequently gifted with the best voices."

"Yes, but this was sung in Italian—Teresa must be an accomplished linguist as well as musician."

"She has travelled a good deal with us, and is rather quick at picking up languages," he said, carelessly; and at that instant his aunt came in, thus putting an end to the conversation, which was, however, not without its effect on Dollie.

Madame Leclercq was not very well that afternoon, she seemed paler than usual, and a sort of nervousness that was peculiar to her made itself more apparent than usual, and by-and-bye she retired to her couch in a dark corner of the room, leaving to Paul the task of entertaining Dollie—one in which he was most successful.

When Dollie went upstairs to dress for dinner, she was waited on by Madame Leclercq's maid, Teresa—a woman of about thirty, with light hair and pale blue eyes, who could speak very little English. She loosed down the young girl's long shining tresses, and began brushing them out preparatory to braiding them in coils round the pretty, classic head. As she was thus occupied, a sudden idea struck Dollie, and she said, in French,—

"By-the-bye, Teresa, where did you learn to sing so beautifully?"

Teresa looked puzzled, and shook her head.

"I never learned to sing at all, mam'selle."

"Never learned—is it possible? Why, I could have declared when I heard you singing the 'Casta Diva,' this afternoon, that your voice had been very well cultivated."

Teresa looked uncomfortable, and having completed her task of hair dressing, withdrew rather hastily, leaving Dollie to wonder over the strangeness of the afternoon's incident. But she had not much time for meditation; for almost directly the bell rang, and she went down to dinner.

In the evening, when they were all in the drawing-room, Madame Leclercq again went to her corner, and while Paul carefully arranged the cushions for her head, Dollie stepped outside on the lawn, to gather a few monthly roses that still lingered as last remnants of the summer-tide. It was rather dark, the moon not having yet risen, and the stars being partially obscured by drifting clouds, nevertheless there was light enough to distinctly outline every object, and as Dollie glanced carelessly around, her attention became attracted by a dark object standing in the shadow of a magnolia at the other end of the house. She moved a few steps forward in order to see what it was, but as she advanced—the light from the open windows falling full upon her face—the figure, (for it was that of a man wearing a large slouched hat low down over his eyes) drew quickly backward, and Dollie, somewhat startled, returned to the drawing-room and told the others what she had seen.

She was hardly prepared for the reception given her intelligence. Madame Leclercq started up, pale and trembling, and uttered a low, half repressed cry of alarm, while Paul's first action was to hastily close the windows and fasten the shutters, after which he went over to his aunt, and putting his hand on her shoulder, forced her into her seat.

"Don't alarm yourself," he said, reassuringly, "there is not the least occasion for it. Perhaps, after all, Dollie was mistaken in supposing she saw anyone."

This Dollie very positively denied—the figure had been much too distinct to leave room for doubt.

"Then very likely it was a tramp who had got through some gap in a hedge, and was reconnoitring the house in order to see if he could pick anything up," added Musgrave, doing his best to calm Madame Leclercq. "At all events, I will go into all the rooms and see that the windows are secure, and then warn the servants to be on their guard."

"Don't go away—don't leave me!" she entreated, clinging to his arm, but he gently disengaged himself, and went towards the door.

"You will be all right; no one can possibly get in here. Besides," with a smile, "Dollie will protect you. It is very likely we are brewing a storm in a tea-cup, and that nothing more will be seen or heard of the man; nevertheless, it is better to take precautions."

He went out of the room, and Dollie, who was considerably astonished at the serious way in which they treated this incident, devoted all her attention to the effort of calming Madame Leclercq, whose nerve seemed entirely to have deserted her. The two women were alone for about half-an-hour, and both were devoutly glad when Musgrave returned.

"It is all serene," he said, with a smile. "I took my revolver and a lantern, and carefully searched the grounds and outbuildings, but failed to see anyone. So if the man really had sinister designs he has evidently relinquished them, and we may consider we have had a false alarm."

But in spite of his confident manner, the ladies were far from feeling easy, especially Madame Leclercq, who evidently found it an utter impossibility to recover her self-possession, and all were glad when the time came for saying "Good night." Dollie was to sleep in a large, old-fashioned chamber, panelled with oak, and situated in a long corridor, at the end of which were the rooms appropriated to Madame Leclercq, who, in addition to bed and dressing rooms, had also a small boudoir or study, where, when her nephew was out, she spent the greater portion of her time.

Dollie, whose eyes usually closed directly her head touched the pillow, felt restless and uneasy, and little inclined to sleep. She turned feverishly from one side to the other, starting at every slight sound that fell on her ears, and glancing timidly into the corners where the light of the candle she had left burning could not penetrate, and where the gloom seemed gathered up into positive darkness. The events of the day had rather upset her—there seemed so much that she could not understand in her lover's family, secrets which she was not permitted to share.

The hours crept slowly by, twelve, one, two struck, and still Dollie was lying wide awake, revolving many thoughts in her brain, when suddenly she started up in bed and listened. She fancied she had heard a sound in the corridor outside—a sound so light that none save the most acute hearing could have caught it. Yes, there it was again; a faint, subdued sort of rustle, as if a woman's dress were sweeping the boards. Dollie was not a coward, besides, anything was better than staying there in suspense, so without giving herself time for deliberation, she jumped out of bed, slipped on a dressing-gown, and gently opened the door.

At first she could see nothing but the moonbeams falling through the stained-glass windows, then after a moment's rapid glance round, she distinguished the figure of a woman peering cautiously through the casement—a woman with long golden hair straying in dishevelled masses over her shoulders, and a face of wonderful beauty—the same face Dollie had fancied she saw on the occasion of her first visit to the Firs, but which she had afterwards ascribed to a phantom of imagination, or an optical illusion. But it was neither.

The figure before her, albeit slender and shadowy enough to have belonged to an inhabitant of the spiritual world, was undoubtedly of flesh and blood like herself, and Dollie found her heart sinking like lead in her bosom as she wondered what this presence could mean in her lover's house. As she watched, another figure joined the one at the window—Paul Musgrave, who passed his arm round the lady's waist and drew her gently towards the upper end of the passage, bending down the while to whisper words whose import seemed to the watcher to be of a tender nature.

Trembling violently, Dollie drew back behind a large bronze figure near which she stood, and which effectually concealed her from the view of Musgrave and his companion, who, strangely enough, paused just opposite, thus forcing her to hear part of their conversation.

"You know I am willing to carry out your wishes, whatever may be the cost," Musgrave was saying, in a low but earnest voice, "and if you think it better to leave, I will take you away at once. I have never yet swerved from my vow of fealty, and I never will."

Then they passed on, and went together into Madame Leclercq's boudoir, the door of which was gently closed after them.

Poor Dollie! For nearly half-an-hour she stayed behind the statue, not even finding sufficient energy to go to her room, although the position she was in cramped her, and the chill of the night air struck against her thinly clad limbs, making her shiver with actual physical cold, as well as mental agitation. Thought seemed paralyzed, she could only make out in a dim sort of way that her short-lived dream of happiness was dissolved into thin air, and that Musgrave did not love her. How could he do so when he had this beautiful woman with him—a woman who, Dollie acknowledged with a bitter pang of humiliation, was three times more lovely than herself.

What should she do? go to him, and tell him what she had seen, and beg him to give her an explanation? This was the course prompted by her heart—that tender, loving little heart, which had yielded itself utterly to him, and was well nigh bursting with its load of sorrow. But Dollie was proud too, and every fibre of her being shrank from humiliating herself before a man who, judged from what she had just seen, had only been making love to her for his own amusement. No, she could not do it, but she must think over her situation and then decide on what course to take, and having made this resolution, she crept with lagging footsteps back to her room, and threw herself on the bed—not to sleep, but to lie still, and gaze miserably out of the window, through which the cold dawn presently stole in faint grey shadows.

CHAPTER VI.

The next morning, Dollie did not come down to breakfast until after she had heard the bell ring, and knew she should find both Madame Leclercq and Paul already at the table—she had no wish to see the latter alone just now, for her thoughts were still in too much confusion for her to decide on what she should do with regard to her engagement. Musgrave and his aunt noticed her pallor and the sort of constraint that appeared in her manner, but this they attributed to the fact of her having a headache—an excuse she was enabled to make with perfect truth.

There was very little conversation during breakfast, which was, in effect, nothing more than an empty ceremony so far as all three were concerned, for none of them displayed much appetite, and nearly all the dishes were taken away untasted. Almost directly after the meal had concluded there came a ring at the bell, which unusual occurrence—for no one ever visited Heatherstone Firs save the Mayvernes themselves—seemed to occasion Musgrave and Madame Leclercq considerable uneasiness; the latter was on the point of withdrawing when the sound of Squire May-

verne's voice in the hall reassured her, and a minute later he came into the room, followed by Sidney Champneys.

"I am an early visitor, am I not?" said the Squire, in his jovial tones, kissing his daughter, and shaking hands with the others. "Luckily, I finished my business in W— last night, and so was able to get away first thing this morning, and thought I could not do better than call and drive Dollie home with me. By-the-bye, does Champneys know Madame Leclercq?" he added suddenly, as he observed Sidney's eyes fixed on the lady, and noticed that Paul made no attempt to introduce them to each other.

Musgrave, thus recalled to his duties, performed the task, and Madame Leclercq bowed without speaking, and then sat down on the couch, and taking up a skein of wool commenced winding it.

"Let me help you!" exclaimed Champneys, following her to her corner, and bending down to take the wool from her hands, but before she could speak Musgrave interfered.

"Had you not better go and write the despatch you wished sent off this morning?" he said. "The man is waiting to take it, and I am sure our friends will excuse you."

She accepted the suggestion and left the room, Champneys hastening to open the door for her, and looking after her with a curious smile as she passed out.

"I want you to dine with us this evening," said the Squire to Musgrave; "we have a friend of Champneys—who happened to be staying at the same hotel at W—as ourselves—coming. He is a Russian nobleman named Zouroff, and as you know so much of Russia, it will be interesting for you to meet him."

The young man started violently, and looked across at Champneys, who, however, met his gaze with the most perfect unconcern, and said, as if in answer to it,—

"Yes; it was strange I should meet General Zouroff at W—, was it not? As you know, or may have heard, he is an antiquarian, and has come to England for the sake of some old relics—Heaven knows what! The Squire has promised to show him his collection, afterwards he is going back to the Rectory to stay a day or two with me before returning to St. Petersburg."

Paul received the information in silence, and soon afterwards his visitors, including Dollie, left; Champneys driving to the Manor, where he intended staying all day, as both his aunt and uncle were away from the Rectory.

Dollie went straight to her room, and there brooded miserably over her position, whose unhappiness was augmented by the fact that her father was ignorant of what had passed between herself and Musgrave.

Oh! how she wished she had resisted her lover's desire for secrecy, then, at least, part of her burden would be removed.

She pondered for a long time, and at last rose and went downstairs into the library. Her present duty seemed clear enough. She must tell the Squire of everything that had passed, and be guided by him as to her future course.

She found him alone, and then kneeling by his side, with her face hidden on his sleeve, she made her confession, and instead of being blamed, received the most loving sympathy. Angry with her for not telling him before? No, certainly not—why should he be when it was not her fault, but Musgrave's?

The Squire drew her into his arms, and fondled the pretty head laid against his shoulder, and then he began to consider what steps he had better take, and came to the conclusion that he would go at once to Heatherstone Firs, and see Paul himself, but before he could put his design in execution, a note was brought to Dollie, which proved to be from Musgrave. She tore it eagerly open, her heart redoubling its beatings, while a wild hope that it might contain a full explanation made her eyes fill with a bright light of anticipation, and the blood rush vividly to her cheeks.

Its contents ran thus:—

"MY DARLING,

"In obedience to a call that I am bound to obey, I have to leave Heatherstone at once, without even saying good-bye to you. I need not tell you how deeply I feel the parting, but it is imperative, and so I can do nothing but bow to fate, and trust it will not keep us long asunder. Later on I will explain my hurried departure; now I have not even time to write more. Make my excuses and adieux to your father, with whom I will communicate before long. In the meantime I hardly dare ask you to write, but I shall call at the 'Poste Restante,' Paris, next week to see if there are any letters for me,

"Yours always,

"PAUL MUSGRAVE."

Until a final blow comes, we can never properly estimate how much of hope we have cherished. In spite of everything, Dollie had in her heart of hearts clung tenaciously to her faith in her lover, but now—what could she do save imagine herself deceived—deserted for the sake of that other fair woman, who had apparently taken Musgrave at his word, and decided on the advisability of their leaving England?

Without speaking, she handed the note to her father, whose brow darkened ominously as he read; but the Squire was a man who never did things in a hurry, and even now, furious as he felt at the idea of any man putting a slight on his daughter, his first thought was for Dollie's happiness, which he could easily see was bound up in her love for Musgrave.

"Leave me alone for a little while," he said, and when she had left the room, he rang the bell, and despatched a servant in search of Sidney Champneys. Champneys had known Musgrave in St. Petersburg, therefore it was probable he might be able to give details of his history, that would throw some light on this entanglement—at all events the Squire, who had great faith both in his ability and his honour, decided he would tell him everything, and hear what he had to say.

He did tell him everything, Sidney listening with the deepest attention, and when the recital was finished the younger man's brow knit themselves together as if he were in perplexed thought.

"You have placed me in an awkward position," he said, at last, "but I will remember only one thing, that I have a duty to perform in protecting your daughter's happiness, and that consideration shall be paramount. You are right in supposing I know something of Musgrave's former life, and perhaps I ought to have spoken of it before, but you know how hard it is for one man to asperse another's character, and so, after a good deal of consideration, I decided to remain a passive spectator of events, and to let them guide me. The time has now arrived when it becomes necessary to speak, still I would rather you got your information concerning Musgrave from any lips save mine. General Zouroff knows as much, if not more, of his character and antecedents than I do, and will tell you all this evening if I explain to him the necessity of such a revelation, which I certainly shall do. Will you wait till then?"

To this the Squire consented. General Zouroff was a nobleman, an officer, and a man on whose veracity he felt he could rely; besides, he fully sympathized with, and even admired Sidney's reluctance to speak against a man who, it was easy to see, he regarded as a rival.

"So the time has come when old scores may be wiped off, Monsieur Paul," muttered Champneys to himself, as he withdrew from the library, and went out on the terrace. "As for those documents with which you threatened me—you may send them away as soon as you like. I have withdrawn from diplomacy, and so they won't hurt me now—for the affair those papers treat of could not be made public because of the other names connected with them. I think marrying an heiress will pay better than my post at St. Petersburg, and besides, I shall have the pleasure of rivaling you,"—from which it will be seen that Mr. Champneys

had fully made up his mind to make Dollie his wife.

He had not been on the terrace very long, when Dollie herself came out, dressed ready for walking.

"I am going to Heatherstone Firs," she said, in answer to his question. "I want to see Madame Leclercq."

"But Madame Leclercq is not there," he said, keeping by her side, and speaking in a tone of conviction. And he proved to be right. The house was quite deserted save for the presence of a gardener, who had been hastily called in and installed as caretaker. He knew nothing whatever of the movements of his master, except that he and Madame Leclercq and two servants had gone away in a carriage about an hour ago.

"Then," said Dollie, unconscious in her excitement that she was speaking aloud, "if there were only four—two servants and Madame Leclercq and Paul—that other . . . must be in the house."

Sidney looked at her curiously, and drew her aside.

"I have something to tell you concerning this 'aunt' of Paul Musgrave's," he said, in a low voice. "Have you never suspected that she was acting a part, and that instead of being an old woman she was a young one?"

Dollie started back in astonishment. No, she had certainly never suspected that.

"Nevertheless, such is the case. I discovered it this morning directly I saw her," Champneys went on. "She was made up very cleverly it is true, with the wrinkles simulated to perfection, and the stoop of age in her shoulders; only one thing was forgotten—her hands. Perhaps if I had seen her casually, and had no suspicions of her identity, I, too, might have been taken in, but as this was not so I observed her very closely, and her hands at once attracted my attention by their smoothness and beauty."

"She usually wore mittens, she must have forgotten them to-day," Dollie put in, mechanically. She did not question the veracity of Champneys' words, for everything tended to confirm it. She recollected how Madame Leclercq refused to go out or to see anyone except herself—how careful she always was to sit in a darkened room, and with her back to the light, and how she invariably wore large blue glasses, and had her white hair dressed in such a fashion as to hide as much of her brow and temples as possible.

This hypothesis also explained the strange fact of the limited staff of servants in the house, and another thing as well—the apparition of last night. Yes, she saw it all now—Madame Leclercq and the golden-haired woman who had appeared in the corridor were one and the same.

CHAPTER VII.

IN due time General Zouroff—a man of about fifty-five, tall, dark, and inscrutable-looking as the Sphinx—arrived at Mayverne Manor, having been driven there from the station by Sidney Champneys, who on the way, had given him such details as he thought fit of the position of affairs with regard to Musgrave. The General was therefore not surprised when, directly after Dollie had withdrawn from the dinner-table, Champneys passed him over a photograph, saying,—

"Be good enough to tell Mr. Mayverne who this gentleman is."

The officer glanced at the likeness and threw it down with a gesture of contempt.

"His name is Charteris," he answered in English, which he spoke very well. "He was living at St. Petersburg about a year ago, but left in consequence of the failure of some Nihilist plot in which he was engaged, and which was the cause of his being forbidden to remain in the country. His estates were confiscated, and no one knew what had become of him."

"A Nihilist!" gasped the Squire, who was conservative to the backbone, and looked upon

socialism with the most unfeigned horror. "A Nihilist! And I thought him such an upright man—such an honest, brave, good-hearted fellow!"

"Of his courage there can be no doubt," said Zouroff, who, a soldier himself, gave a soldier's meed of praise, although he heartily disliked the man they were speaking of. "Personally I know very little of him, and desire to know less. Champneys has been telling me that he was your daughter's wooer, and as this is the case, I think I only fulfil my duty in warning you against him."

"I don't want warnings, I want facts," said the Squire, bluntly.

"And facts you shall have," interposed Sidney. Then turning to the officer he added, "When Musgrave—or to give him his right name, Charteris—left Russia he had a companion with him, had he not?"

"Yes."

"And that companion was—?"

"My ward, Ida Schlonski, who it was my wish should become the wife of my son. I had made arrangements for their marriage when I discovered that Ida was secretly in league with the Nihilists, and on my accusing her she boldly acknowledged it, and said that she had pretended to yield to my desire for her marriage with my son in order to gain time to mature her plans, but that she had no intention of becoming his wife. I then threatened her with severer measures than I had yet taken; but that same night, through the connivance of one of the servants, she managed to escape from St. Petersburg and to fly to Charteris—who, I suppose was her lover—and who was at that time staying in his own chateau. She had been on very friendly terms with his sister Olga, who had taken a most prominent part in political intrigues, and would probably have been in Siberia now if she had not died."

"Then do you mean to say that this Ida Schlonski was with Musgrave at Heatherstone Firs?" demanded the Squire of Champneys.

"I mean to say she and Madame Leclercq are identical."

There was a short silence, then the Squire turned to General Zouroff,—

"But why did you not follow your ward, and bring her back?"

"I did so, but lost time at first through not knowing where she was, and when I arrived at Charteris' place, I found it deserted, although I found on inquiry that Ida and Charteris had only left the preceding night, having been detained through the death of his sister, which occurred very suddenly. To my great surprise, I received a letter from Charteris, saying he had married Ida, and this I easily ascertained to be correct; so as my scruples with regard to her honour were satisfied, I made no further attempt to trace her, but washed my hands of her altogether. I have no wish ever to see her again."

"Then she is his wife?"

"Undoubtedly, or he himself has lied. Stay! I have his letter still in my pocket-book, and will show it you."

Which he did; and the Squire, who was well acquainted with the peculiarities of Musgrave's writing, could not doubt the authenticity of the document submitted to him, which was signed "Paul Musgrave Charteris."

"The villain!" he exclaimed, clenching his hands, and starting from his chair in his angry excitement. "But what motive can he possibly have had in deceiving my little Dollie?"

"I think I can supply one," said Champneys. "He hated me in consequence of my having refused to marry his sister, who did me the honour of falling in love with me. I was incautious enough to let him see that the greatest happiness I could have would be to win Dollie's heart, and he resolved to prevent me. With a man of his character, this would be quite sufficient."

All this the Squire repeated to his daughter

later on, after his guests had left him. Dollie listened very quietly, her cheeks white, and her eyes downcast; but no movement save the pressure of her hands across her bosom revealed how much this calmness cost her.

"My poor darling!" her father said, taking her in his arms as he concluded, "your trial is indeed a hard one; but still, Dollie,"—his tone changing to one of angry recollection—"pride must come to your rescue. You must not grieve after a man who has insulted you so grossly; he is unworthy of one of your tears, my dear one."

She knew that, and yet—and yet—

"I am going to write to him," continued the Squire, "and I shall tell him never to dare address you again. I shall not enter into any details for the sake of Sidney Champneys, who does not wish him to know the part he has had in unmasking his perfidy. Good Heavens! how I have been mistaken in that man! I thought him so true and upright!"

Dollie crept silently upstairs, and into her chamber; and then, when she had locked the door, and knew herself safe from intrusion, her wounded love broke all barriers of self-restraint, and she threw herself on the bed, her head buried in the pillows, while great agonized sobs burst from her.

She had loved him so dearly—had set him up in her heart as her ideal hero, possessing every attribute of grandeur and nobility. And now there was nothing left but to dethrone him, to cast him from his pedestal, because what she imagined to be pure gold was, after all, only a spurious imitation!

Poor Dollie! She was learning her woman's lesson of broken faith—fulfilling her woman's mission of sorrow and renunciation.

But sorrow does not *kill* even when it blights the best part of our existence, and though in our anguish we cry out that our hearts are broken, and long for death, death comes not, and as the days go on we find that hearts are very tough, and time brings its own consolation.

So it was with Dollie Mayverne. At first it had seemed to her impossible to live, now that he who had grown to be the dearest part of her life was reft from her; and she had wandered listlessly about, pale and wan, until one day her father had told her how unspcakably miserable it made him to see her so. Then the thought of what she owed him had come to her aid; she made a supreme effort to conquer herself—and succeeded.

True, the world was not quite the same as it used to be—something had vanished from it. The sunshine was not quite so bright, the flowers less sweet, and Dollie herself a great deal older; but for all that there were still duties to be performed, and pleasure to be taken in performing them.

And so six months passed away, and Spring came with her soft winds and sunny skies, and her lap full of flowers, throwing over the world the veil of her beauty, and filling the air with the songs of her birds. During all this time Sidney Champneys had been at the Rectory, or, to speak more correctly, he had *slept* there, for the greater part of his days were spent at the Manor, and Dollie often used to wonder what she should do without him. He was so attentive to her, so solicitous of all her wants, and careful to supply them, and, above all, so unostentatiously sympathetic that the girl's heart turned to him almost unconsciously, and she grew to prize his friendship very highly. But when Sidney, not content with friendship, asked for love, she drew back, for she was very true to Paul in spite of his unworthiness, and she knew no other man could ever take the place he held in her heart.

Sidney pleaded very hard. He told her that if she would only marry him, love would come after, but she only shook her head—she knew better. Still she had a very severe battle to fight, for Sidney's wooing was assisted by the Squire, who fancied he had not been feeling very well lately, and whose great desire was to see his daughter married to a good husband, such as

he fancied Champneys would make. The result of this combined influence was that at last, out of sheer weariness, Dollie temporized by promising to take time to consider Sidney's offer, and to give him an answer on her birthday—the twentieth of June, and with this he was forced to be content.

But long before then—in the latter part of April, indeed—Dollie began to droop and grow pale, and the family doctor was called in, and prescribed the usual formula—change of air. So change of air she had; for the Squire lost no time in taking her to a certain pretty little place in Wales, where the waters are supposed to possess wonderful medicinal qualities—if they were only half as health restoring as they are nasty then, indeed, they might be considered a veritable boon to mankind!

Champneys had business in London that he could not neglect, so he was unable to accompany them to Llan—, where they arrived one May evening, and proceeded at once to the apartments that had been engaged for them—a suite of rooms in a pretty house some little distance from the town (if to such a dignified title it might lay claim), standing in rather extensive grounds, and having a balcony overhung with climbing plants running all round it. Both Dollie and her father were rather tired, for the journey had been a long one, and neither were sorry to sit down to the substantial tea that had been provided in lieu of dinner. After it was over, the Squire strolled out to look at the place, and smoke a cigar, while Dollie, wrapping a light shawl round her shoulders, went on the balcony, and watched the fading colours of the sunset above the dim blue hills, behind which the sun had gone down half an hour ago.

It was a lovely spring evening, very quiet and serene, with only a thrush's song to break the stillness in little trills of melody; overhead a few stars were beginning to come out, but they shone very faintly as yet, for dusk had hardly drawn her curtain, and the amber radiance of the dead daylight still lingered in a sort of misty after-glow. It was just the hour when one's thoughts naturally slip back to the past, and Dollie's drifted away to that brief happy evening, six months ago, when Paul had told her he loved her. Ah, the irrevocable dead past! Would anything the future could give her ever redeem it?

She sighed deeply, and at that moment a gentleman stepped out of a window at the other end of the balcony, and leaning on the railings, gazed out across to the dark woods, clothing the distant hills. He either did not see or took no notice of Dollie, whose heart began to beat very rapidly as she watched him. He had a curious air of listlessness and depression, and once he put up his hand and pushed back the hair from his brow with a gesture of such utter weariness that it seemed actually hopeless. He stayed there for about five minutes; then a weak but clear voice said, "Paul!" and he instantly turned and re-entered the room.

Dollie had recognized him at once; it was Musgrave, and evidently his wife was with him. If the girl had thought that time, absence—even his own conduct—had destroyed her love, this moment undeceived her, for the mere sight of him was sufficient to set all her pulses throbbing. Oh, if he had only been what she thought he was—if fate had only ordered things differently!

There was very little sleep for Dollie that night; indeed, she made no attempt to go to bed, but paced restlessly up and down, her hands clasped in front of her, and a white misery on her face. Gradually all the sounds of life in the house died away, the last footstep passed her room, the last door was closed, and silence reigned over all. It was rather a close night, with thunder in the air, and Dollie by-and-bye went to her window and threw it wide open to let in the night breeze; then, not content with this, she stepped outside on the balcony, and pushed back the hair from her temples, in the hope that the fresh air would relieve their painful throbbing.

She had not been outside a minute when a shriek, shrill and piercing, rent the silence of the night, and woke up the slumbering echoes—a shriek that made the blood run cold in Dollie's veins, for it was one of some human being in mortal agony. Directly afterwards a dark figure, wearing a wide brimmed, soft felt hat rushed out of the room from whence Paul Musgrave had issued earlier in the evening, swung himself over the railings with incredible rapidity, and instantly disappeared behind some trees in the garden below.

Dollie was brave enough, and after a second's hesitation she ran along the balcony, pushed aside the lace curtains that shrouded the window of the room from which the sound proceeded, and stepped inside.

The apartment was evidently used as a sitting-room, and a shaded lamp stood on a table littered over with writing materials, and drawn up close to a couch that came within the radius of the light. There, attired in a white dressing-gown, with her golden hair falling in tangled masses about her shoulders, and a strange, set expression on her clearly-chiselled features, lay the form of a woman, the laces at her bosom dyed crimson with blood streaming from the wound of a dagger, that a sure and strong hand had driven straight to her heart.

By her side knelt Musgrave, who had only just come in, and who was bending forward, holding her hand and calling her by every tender name, in the vain effort to hear once more the tones of a voice that death had silenced for ever!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE murder of a young and beautiful woman in that quiet little Welsh village made a nine days' wonder; but the crime was one of those destined to lie enshrouded in impenetrable mystery; so far as the outside world was concerned, although no one doubted that its perpetrator was the man Dollie Mayverne had seen leaping from the balcony.

An inquest was held, and an open verdict returned, and then the remains of the unfortunate girl were interred in the churchyard at the foot of the grand solemn hills, whose shadow always darkened it; and the life that had been so chequered and storm-tossed at last found rest in the quiet oblivion of the grave.

But before that Paul had contrived to get an interview with Dollie, and out in the garden, in the calm hush of the evening he told her his tale, and unravelled the mystery that had hitherto enveloped his actions.

"I will begin at the very beginning, in order that you may obtain a clear comprehension of everything," he said, looking at her with the old love light in his eyes—eyes that were very sad, for Paul had changed a great deal in these last few months, and there were a good many grey hairs in the thick locks lying over his temples. "Well, as I believe I have already told you, I was the son of an English father and Russian mother, and about two years after she had been left a widow the latter was married again to a countryman of her own, I being at that time four years old. She had by her second marriage one daughter, whose name was Olga, and of whom she was passionately fond. I shared her love for my step-sister, although I saw very little of her, as my education was conducted partly in Germany and partly in England, and I rarely went to Russia till I was grown up. By that time my step-father was dead, and when I was about nineteen my mother found herself attacked by an incurable malady, and sent for me in order that I might be with her as long as possible. Her sole anxiety seemed to have for its object my sister, who it had been arranged by the terms of her father's will should be sent to her uncle in case she was left an orphan before the age of twenty-one. My mother both disliked and distrusted this uncle; and one day she extorted from me a solemn promise to watch over Olga, to help her if she should be in any

difficulty, and—whatever might befall—never to desert her. Thank Heaven! my conscience is clear on that score—I have kept my vow to the very letter!" added the young man, fervently.

"After my mother's death, I returned to England, and Olga's education was conducted under the superintendence of her uncle, who had a great prejudice against the English, and was far from fond of me, personally. In consequence of this I saw very little of my sister; for on leaving the university I commenced a tour in America, and only returned to Europe on hearing of the death of Olga's guardian, which intelligence caused me to hasten to Russia. When I got there I found to my horror that Olga had become entirely imbued with the Nihilistic principles of her late uncle, and that she was bent on promoting the cause by every means in her power. It was in vain that I pointed out to her the unsuitability of a woman interfering with politics; in vain I argued that the line adopted by her party was one to be very strongly reprobated. She was so enthusiastic that nothing would convince her, but I still persevered in the hope that as time went on she would see more clearly. It was then that I made the acquaintance of Sidney Champneys, who was in the Government service, and who professed to be in love with Olga. They were betrothed, and would doubtless have been married had not some papers fallen by chance into my hands that clearly demonstrated the double part Champneys was playing. While receiving the pay of the Government he was actually in league with the ultra party, and probably was false to both. So through my influence the engagement was broken off, but owing to Olga's entreaties I consented not to unmask her former lover. Well, a plot against the life of Emperor was on foot, and, unknown to me, the house I occupied with my sister was used as a rendezvous for the conspirators. Luckily the scheme did not attain its object, but Olga and I were suspected of complicity in it, and were forced to leave the capital and fly to a château belonging to me, but situated a safe distance from St. Petersburg. And here occurred the event that led to such disastrous consequences. It seems some secret society to which Olga belonged had decreed the death of a certain official of high rank, who had shown the greatest kindness to our family, and they had drawn lots as to whose should be the hand to strike the blow. The lot fell on my sister, but she, whether from the effect of my remonstrances or the natural horror of being the means of taking human life, would not accept the task assigned to her. Just then certain of the designs of that same society were frustrated, and it became certain some one must have betrayed them. They decided it must be Olga, but she declared to me her solemn conviction that Champneys himself was the traitor. Be that as it may, Olga was condemned to death by her own party; and her devoted friend, Ida Zouroff, escaped from St. Petersburg and came to her on purpose to warn her to disguise herself, and leave the country without a moment's delay."

Here Paul hesitated a little, and a flush came on his cheek, but presently he continued—

"Then I discovered, through my sister, that Ida cared for me, and it seemed she was in terror of returning to her guardian, because he was trying to urge on her marriage with his son. I knew, too, how the girl's reputation would suffer through her leaving home to come to me; so, urged on by Olga, I did the only thing in my power to show gratitude for the service she had rendered us. I procured a priest, and we were married at once, intending, immediately after the ceremony, to proceed to France, where we purposed taking refuge, and where my sister determined to enter a convent. She had been seized with a terrible dread when she learned the intelligence brought by Ida; for she was well aware that such a decree was irrevocable, and that her life might at any moment pay the penalty."

On the very day of my marriage—into which I need hardly tell you no element of love entered—at least so far as I was concerned—a dreadful catastrophe occurred. I had been examining some pistols with a view to seeing they were in proper condition for use, and had just laid them down on the table, when Ida came in and took one in her hands. How it happened I know not, but she somehow contrived to pull the trigger, and the weapon went off, shooting her in the breast.

"She did not immediately succumb to the accident, but lay for some hours fully conscious and her mind less occupied with her own approaching end—of which she was perfectly aware—than with the thought of Olga's peril; and it was she herself who proposed and elaborated the plan upon which we afterwards acted. She suggested that a report should be spread to the effect that Olga had died, and that it was herself who would accompany me to France; and so she was buried under the name of Olga, whose chances of escape from the doom decreed her were thus trebled. I wrote and informed General Zouroff of my marriage with his niece, but told him no particulars, and I have not since seen or heard from him. Olga and I, and the two servants we had taken with us, and who we knew we could depend upon for keeping our secret, stayed in France some time, and then it became known to us that our scheme was suspected by the society, and so we determined to come to England; and I proceeded to make inquiries for a residence where we might count on being as secluded as possible, and finally bought Heatherston Firs. But before going there Olga decided that, as a further precaution against identification, she would disguise herself as an elderly woman and pass as my aunt, whose age and failing health would serve as very good excuses for her not leaving home or receiving visitors, and at the same time prevent any comment in the neighbourhood. She also desired me to change my name and assume that of 'Musgrave,' and to all this I agreed; for in the first place I knew as well as herself the gravity of her position; and, secondly, I was aware that she inherited her mother's malady, and that at best her life could only be a short one. And so we came to the Firs, and I met you—and loved you. I fought hardly enough against my passion; for, situated as I was, I had no right to bind you by a promise; but circumstances were too strong for me, and I could not control my words on that memorable evening of the garden party. My reason for wishing you to keep secret our engagement was this. A personal friend of mine, high in favour at the Russian Court, was doing his best to convince the Emperor of my innocence, and to repeal the sentence of banishment issued against me, and I expected to hear every day that he had succeeded, and that my estates were restored to me. Till then I felt I could not ask your father for your hand, for you were a rich heiress, and it might have been thought I had mercenary motives in wooing you, especially if I could not have explained my position—and this Olga had wrung from me a sacred promise never to do without her permission. She refused to allow me to speak, and I feared to press her too much; for the constant state of dread in which she lived was not without effect on her, and I often fancied her reason would give way beneath it; besides, her health was failing very rapidly, and the physicians I had down from London secretly told me she could not possibly live twelve months. You know how things went on until that night when you stayed at Heatherstone Firs, and saw the man in the garden—you thought it was a tramp; we knew better, for it meant we had been tracked once more, and that the Firs was no longer a safe retreat. All that night Olga and I sat up watching, and the next day we decided on going at once to London. I had no time to see you and dared not write at length, although I wished to do so, for I fancied you were angry with me, and that you did not believe what I had told you the preceding day about the song you heard, and which you will

now understand was sung by Olga herself. Well, I got your father's letter afterwards, and I could not reply to it, for Olga was dangerously ill—excessive agitation had caused her to break a blood vessel, and for weeks I watched by her sick bed never expecting she would recover. Gradually however, she got better, and the doctors advised her to come here, and see what effect the waters would have. You know the rest, darling—how the ruthless vengeance of the assassin pursued her, and she was at last struck down, when she deemed herself safest. But you can never know how, during all this time, I have longed for my lost love!"

"Not your lost love, Paul," she said, nestling closer to him. "Thank Heaven, I never gave my promise to Sidney Champney!"

"Thank Heaven you never did!" repeated Paul, fervently. "He is a scoundrel in every sense of the word. I knew quite well he recognised Olga that morning at the Firs, only it was to his interest to make you believe I had Ida Zouroff with me. However, we will not speak of him now!"

Heatherstone Firs is no longer the dismal, ghostly old habitation it once was, but having had a considerable amount of taste and money expended on it is now a model country house; for though Paul's sentence of exile has been rescinded, and his estates given back to him, he has no desire to return to Russia, but is quite content to live the life of a country gentleman, happy in the possession of the sweetest wife man ever had!

[THE END.]

SWEET INISFAIL.

CHAPTER VI.

HAVING disposed of the dwarf, at least for the present, and being, as he imagined, in possession of funds sufficient to keep him without work for the rest of his days, Frederick Manton started out for the old state quarry.

The night wore away slowly—so slowly that he thought it never would end, and the pangs of hunger and thirst began to assail him keenly. The latter he assuaged from a large flask he had filled, at first diluting the whisky with water from a little spring he discovered; but when at last morning came, and he had another twelve hours to stay without food, he began to drink the spirit neat. This served him for a while, and he was prudent enough to reserve a little. But when night fell he was so famished, and felt so faint and exhausted, that he determined to obtain food at any cost.

While revolving the matter over in his mind he suddenly remembered the cottage which poor Fitzgerald had given his brother George; and believing it would be quite untenanted, thought it would make a capital place of concealment until he could procure food enough to last him until he was away from the neighbourhood.

He at once acted on the idea, found the cottage apparently deserted, and, what was more, the door open. He entered cautiously, and closing the door carefully behind him stood still for a moment.

He was about to cross into the inner room when a deep groan smote his ear. In his fright he almost dropped his lantern, and his first impulse was to rush away; but second thoughts convinced him that the inmate of the room was evidently in deep pain, and quite unable to cope with him, and by waiting a few minutes he should soon see if there were others present. Several minutes—they seemed ages to him—elapsed and no sound; then another prolonged groan followed by oppressive silence.

Frederick Manton determined to risk everything, and cautiously opening the door of the room found it dark as midnight. He turned on his lantern, and there stretched on the bed lay his victim Fitzgerald.

"Not dead after all," he muttered, as soon as he recovered from his first shock of surprise. "Shall I finish him now? No, I'll make his recovery the price of my safety." He set his lantern on the table, drew his flask from his pocket, and forced some of the spirit down the wounded man's throat. It seemed to revive him a little, and he looked up with weary eyes, but a troubled expression came into them, and he sank back exhausted.

Satisfied there was no one else in the house Manton searched the kitchen, and found some provisions, a portion of which he greedily devoured, and some whisky, with which he filled his flask, and then returned to the bedside of Fitzgerald. To do him justice he did his best to restore him to consciousness; washed and bound up his wounds, gave him the diluted spirit, and bathed his burning head with whisky and vinegar.

At length towards dawn he was rewarded by his patient after a sigh again opening his eyes, and this time with evident recognition. In a few words Manton explained everything, and producing a revolver from his pocket gave Fitzgerald clearly to understand that he would never leave that room alive if he did not effectually secure his escape.

"Then you may as well kill me at once," said Fitzgerald, "for I'll have no hand in the business."

"You'll think better of it during the day," was the reply. "Life is sweet, and remember Agnes Fail."

Fitzgerald closed his eyes, and a deep groan escaped his lips, but he said no more. The day wore on, and, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, Manton fell asleep. He was aroused by the sound of wheels and voices outside the cottage. With an oath he sprang to his feet, and peering forth saw a car drawn up in front, from which Agnes Fail was alighting. Was there ever such a cursed mischance? He hid himself in a sort of wardrobe cupboard, and the next instant Agnes was in the room. With a cry of mingled joy and alarm she flew towards the bed, when her attention was drawn to the sudden opening of the cupboard door, and a man with a white set face and a revolver in his hand said in a low, guttural voice, "Utter another word, Miss Fail, and it shall be your last."

She stood transfixed with horror, when the feeble voice of Fitzgerald from the bed cried, "Make no terms with the villain, Agnes; he tried his best to murder me." She turned again with tears in her eyes, and was about to reply when the door opened; and the carman, whom she had told she should return in a moment as she had only driven over to get a keepsake Fitzgerald had given her, looked in at the door. Seeing, as he thought, Miss Fail in peril, he grasped the butt of his whip short in his hand and sprang upon Frederick Manton. The struggle was short but decisive. The revolver went off, but hurt no one, and Manton was stretched on his back senseless. To bind him securely was the work of a few minutes, and the carman promised to wait while Agnes went for assistance. That night saw Frederick Manton lodged in gaol, and his brother George set free. Fitzgerald was removed to O'Grady's, and was soon restored to pristine health and vigour.

The trial of Frederick Manton created a great sensation. He was found guilty and sentenced to penal servitude for life. The dwarf, who had pursued him with relentless animosity, continued his nefarious career, and was himself imprisoned for swindling, and died in gaol.

As soon as Fitzgerald was thoroughly recovered the marriage between himself and Agnes Fail took place amid the congratulations and rejoicings of every one. Indeed, such a happy day had never been known in Clonmore in the memory of the very oldest inhabitant; and there was not a single one from that venerable individual down to the smallest babe that lisped, but what wished health, long life, and happiness to SWEET INISFAIL.

THE END.

FACETIÆ.

THE LOVE THAT LASTS.—The love of money. "WHAT is more beautiful than the word *wife*?"—The wife herself.

To cure deafness in a man, begin to whisper to him about a chance to make his fortune.

MUSICAL PROBLEM.—If a man blows his own trumpet, can his opinions be *sound*?

WANTED.—An artist to paint the very picture of health.

HOPE.—A sentiment exhibited in the wag of a dog's tail when he's waiting for a bone.

ONE good turn is as much as you can expect from a cheap silk.

"GENEROUS TO A FAULT" may be said of the majority of men—at least they are generous enough to their own faults.

AN amateur farmer sent to an agricultural society to put him down on the premium list for a calf. They did so.

A FRENCH BOOKSELLER, who prided himself on his English, said to one of his customers:—"This is bound in mutton, sir, and this in veal."

"I SEE that old Colonel Jubeson is dead," said a gentleman to a friend.—"Did he leave anything?"—"Oh, yes."—"How much?"—"All he had."

AN extreme testotaller of our acquaintance has declared his inability to sympathise with Turkey, for fear of being accused of an adherence to the Porte.

LAUCHIE: "Fat sort o' a minister his she gotten, Geordie?"—Geordie: "Weel, he's no' muckle worth; we seldom see him. Sax days o' the week he's invisible, an' on the seventh he's incomprehensible."

A KISS on the forehead denotes respect and admiration; on the cheek, friendship; on the lips, love. The young men of our acquaintance have not much "respect" for young ladies.

TOLD BY A PARROT.—The way that a woman lately identified her stolen parrot was by bringing her husband into Court and scolding him. The bird soon called out, "Oh, I wish you were dead, old woman!"

A THEOLOGICAL student, supposed to be deficient in judgment, in the course of a class examination was asked by a professor, "Pray, Mr. E., how would you discover a fool?"—"By the questions he would ask," said Mr. E.

THEY asked the orier in one of the courts if he did not find it difficult to while away the time during the hearing of dry cases. "Oh no," was the prompt reply; "I just lean my head back, and sleep the sleep of the judge."

A LITTLE GIRL went timidly into a shop the other day, and asked the showman how many shoe-strings she could get for a penny.—"How long do you want them," he inquired.—"I want to keep them," was the answer in a tone of slight surprise.

A PARTY of vegetarians who were boarding at a water-cure establishment, while taking a walk in the fields, were attacked by a bull, which chased them furiously out of his pasture. "That's your gratitude, is it, you hateful thing!" exclaimed one of the ladies, panting with fright and fatigue. "After this I'll eat beef three times a day."

AN old lady who was in the habit of boasting after an occurrence of any event which she had predicted, was one day cleverly "sold" by her worthy spouse, who had got tired of hearing her eternal "I told you so." Rushing into the house breathless with excitement, he dropped into a chair, elevated his hands and exclaimed: "Oh, my dear, what do you think? The old cow has gone and eaten up our grindstone!" The old lady was ready, and, hardly waiting to hear the last word, she screamed out at the top of her lungs, "I told you so. I told you so. You always would let it stand out of doors."

STATISTICS.

For the last five years France has consumed 33,000 tons of tobacco, which is three times as much as was used in 1832. The revenue derived by the State from this enormous consumption of the fragrant weed is £10,000,000 a year.

EUROPEAN RAILWAYS.—Recently published statistics regarding the length of railways in different European States at the end of last year showed that Germany possessed 34,314 kilometres; Great Britain, 29,232; France 27,535; Russia, 23,739; Austria, 19,126; Italy, 8,774; Spain, 7,839; Sweden, 7,431; Belgium, 4,123; Switzerland, 2,506; Holland, 2,296; Denmark, 1,696; Roumania, 14,174; Turkey, 1,395; Portugal, 1,219; Greece, 10. The total is 172,372 kilometres; in a straight line this is equivalent to thirty-five times round the world.

THE FOUR GREAT PORTS.—Liverpool ranks as the most important port in the world, with an annual tonnage of 2,647,372; London stands second, with a tonnage of 2,330,688; Glasgow third, with 1,432,364; New York fourth, with a tonnage of 1,153,676.

GEMS.

WHAT a catalogue of social virtues a man requires to make him generally beloved!

WHAT is eternity?—A day without yesterday or to-morrow—a line that has no end.

A MAN loves when his judgment approves; a woman's judgment approves when she loves.

A GOOD situation is like a savings-box, its value is not known until it is broken.

WERE absolute perfection enthroned, courtiers would certainly discover some way to flatter it.

THE idle should not be classed among the living; they are sort of dead men who can't be buried.

RETRIBUTION stands with uplifted axe, and culture, rank and robes of sanctity cannot stay its blow.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BOILED MUTTON.—The leg is best for this purpose, and will look much nicer when served if it has been tied up in very coarse, thin muslin, or in mosquito netting. Put on in plenty of boiling salted water and cook a quarter of an hour to the pound; unwrap when done, brush all over with butter, and serve with a boat of drawn butter, in which have been stirred two dozen capers or pickled nasturtium seed.

BAKED TOMATOES.—Pare with a sharp knife and cut in thick slices, put a layer of crumbs in the bottom of a bake dish, wet them with a little soup stock or other gravy, cover with tomatoes, seasoned with butter, salt, pepper, and sugar, more crumbs moistened with gravy, and so on to the top of the dish, having well-moistened crumbs for the last layer, cover and bake half an hour, then uncover and brown quickly; serve in the bake dish.

CARAMEL PUDDING.—Put a handful of loaf sugar to boil with a quarter of a pint of water until the syrup becomes a deep brown. Warm a small basin, pour the syrup in it, and keep turning the basin in your hand until the inside is completely coated with the syrup, which by that time will have set. Strain the yolks of eight eggs from the whites, and mix them gradually and effectually with one pint of milk. Pour this mixture into the prepared mould. Lay a piece of paper on the top. Set it in a saucepan full of cold water, taking care that the water does not come over the top of the mould, put on the cover, and let it boil gently by the side of the fire for one hour. Remove the saucepan to a cold place, and when the water is quite cold take out the mould, and turn out the pudding very carefully.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PROPOSALS are about to be considered by the City authorities for the disposal of snow in the streets, should there be any in the coming winter, by means of the application of heat.

A PROPOSAL is being considered to purchase the sight of the National Opera House on the Thames Embankment for the purpose of erecting a central Masonic Hall.

A GREATER number of churches were never known to be in course of erection or undergoing repairs than there are at the present moment in London.

THE large house at the corner of Great Queen-street and Lincoln's-inn-fields, which was till lately the office of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, will shortly be removed. The building is of some historic interest, as it was formerly the residence of the Dukes of Newcastle.

CETEWAYO has become a trade mark, and is of great commercial value. We have "Cetewayo Notepaper" with the outline of that dusky monarch as a crest, "Cetewayo menus," in which his familiar outline appears all over the margin, and it is said early next term the unpermitted use of his name will be a point in a case before the Master of the Rolls, where an important copyright has been infringed. All sorts of extraordinary proposals have been made to this chief, and theatrical managers have resorted to every kind of ruse to secure his services.

FRIENDSHIP.—Whatever happens never forsake a friend. When enemies gather, when sickness falls on the heart, when the world is dark and cheerless, is the time to try true friendship. They who turn from the scenes of distress betray their hypocrisy, and prove that interest only moves them. If you have a friend who loves you, who has studied your interest and happiness, be sure to sustain him in adversity. Let him feel that his love was not thrown away. Real fidelity may be rare, but it exists—in the heart. They only deny its power who never loved a friend or laboured to make a friend happy.

AN ANCIENT NATION.—At the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, China was seven hundred years old; and when Isaiah prophesied of her she had existed fifteen centuries. She has seen the rise and decline of all the great nations of antiquity. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome have long since followed each other to the dust, but China still remains, a solitary and wonderful monument of patriarchal times. Then look at the population of the country, roughly estimated at four hundred millions, more than thirteen times the population of England and Ireland. Every third person that lives and breathes upon the earth and beneath these heavens is a Chinese; every third grave that is dug is for a Chinese.

FLIES.—And now it is stated that flies have a language of their own, inaudible to unaided ears, but no doubt distinctly audible to the ears of insects. This is not the buzzing tone common to all flying insects, which is produced by the rapid movement of their wings, and is but a mere incidental effect, as meaningless as are the sounds of our footfalls when we are walking, but it consists of other tones made voluntarily, no doubt, for the purpose of limited communication with each other—in fly language. The discovery was made by means of the newly-invented microphone while magnifying the tramp of a fly walking on the table, till it sounds as loud as that of a horse walking over a wooden bridge. By close observation during these experiments other sounds were heard different from those of its footfalls or wings, which proved to be its trumpeting calls issuing from its proboscis, and resembling somewhat the distant whinnying of a horse. Such are some of the results of that marvellous instrument which acts for the ear of man as the microscope does for the eye.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. Y. T.—It was very wrong of you to ask the photographer for the lady's picture, and worse for him to give it. We do not blame the lady for being "extremely angry." If you admired her so much, why did you not get yourself introduced, since you know her friends, and in time ask herself for the picture? Now probably, she will always despise you. As for the photographer, he is a scamp, and deserves no custom.

M. B.—You must attend to the small courtesies of life. A person may have virtue, capacity and good conduct, and yet be insupportable. The manners which are neglected as small things are often those which decide men and women for or against you.

LIZA.—Yes! Turkish baths are beneficial to persons undergoing any amount of bodily exertion, or who reside in a warm climate. They should not be indulged in too frequently or without medical advice, as they not only remove the matter already secreted, but also promote fresh secretions, which deprive the blood of nutrient material and greatly try the strength of the individual.

M. B. T.—At no time, probably, was the spirit of etiquette so predominant and so tyrannical as at the Court of Louis XIV. of France. At the present day the etiquette of courts is becoming less and less strict, and in private society many of the old and absurd forms are given up. "Etiquette," says a writer on this subject, "is the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offences the law cannot touch; it is a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar; a guard against those obtuse persons who, having neither talent nor delicacy, would be continually thrusting themselves into the society of men to whom their presence might, from the difference of feeling and habit, be offensive and even insupportable." The rules that are laid down on this subject are various, and are only to be learned properly by experience. Generally, however, a person going into society should maintain a certain degree of self-respect and regard for the feelings of others, and should endeavour to make himself agreeable.

EARNEST.—The general opinion of geologists is that the earth consists of a shell surrounding a molten mass. The thickness of this shell is estimated at from 30 to 100 miles. The principal evidences of this internal heat are hot springs, geysers, volcanoes, and the fact that mines and deep wells are always found to become warmer as we descend lower.

NED W.—Ladies should be exceedingly careful how they write love-letters. Many a fair one has had to repeat the day when, in the overflows of her fond heart, she inscribed what she really felt, and told the man of her choice how much she loved him. Self-respect should stand beside us while we write to one to whose addresses we have favourably listened; and self-respect is never near at hand when the letter abounds in loving epithets and pet-love phrases. Say what you have to say; say it kindly, courteously, respectfully, in the style recognized by civilised society, and not the high-down compliment dialect met with in novels and heard upon the stage.

D. N. O.—Each hair is formed of ten or twelve smaller hairs, which unite at the root, and form a hollow tube, somewhat like a very fine stalk of grass, jointed at intervals. The joints appear to overlap each other, as if one small tube were inserted into that which is nearest to it, and so on to the end of the hair. This structure, though invisible to the naked eye, may be made manifest to the touch. Take a hair several inches long, and work it between your thumb and finger, and you will find that it will always work towards the top end, and never (turn it as you will) towards the root end—proving that the rough overlappings are all directed to the top.

SALLIE.—Some gentlemen, when engaged to young ladies, do not make them any presents but music, flowers, or other elegant trifles; and, indeed, this is now perfectly consistent with etiquette. A lover must not therefore be thought mean because he is not profuse in his presents. His character should be judged from other points of view. We are unable to advise you any further on so delicate a subject.

SALTER.—You are quite right. Handkerchiefs, like flowers, have now a language of their own. The name, initials or monogram, formerly embroidered on handkerchiefs, have been discarded, and instead, is adopted a flower or motto. Thus each selects her own flower and then embroiders below it its flower language. The beautiful brunette chooses for her very own the rose, with the device, "I am all heart;" another a pansy, with the inscription, "My thoughts are only of you." One with a poppy has, "Beauty dwells in the heart and not in the face;" above a sprig of mimosa is the very modest remark, "My qualities surpass my clay from you," "I cling or I die," surmounts an ivy leaf; "Purity and nobility" is written over a lily; while some sentimental damsel inscribes above a primrose, "I am misunderstood."

LADY J.—The young lady to whom you refer has probably been telling bad stories about you. If you really love her, and want her for your wife, you should call upon her and ask for an explanation; but if your pride exceed your love, you can let the matter pass without seeking to come to an understanding, as your friend has suggested. By the way, who is that "friend"? May he not be a snake in the grass? Perhaps he has himself caused the estrangement of the young lady from you, and is now advising you to pursue a course which would prevent the possibility of your ever coming to a good understanding with her again. You would do well to look sharp after that "friend."

MORA.—A good wife is to man wisdom and strength; a bad one is confusion, weakness and despair. No condition is hopeless to a man where the wife possesses firmness, decision, and economy. There is no outward propriety which can counteract indolence, extravagance, and folly at home. No spirit can endure bad influence.

L. M. J.—In order to make grape wine, put twenty pounds of ripe, well-selected, fresh-picked grapes into a stone jar, and pour on them six quarts of boiling water. When the water has become sufficiently cool, squeeze the grapes well with the hand; cover the jar with a cloth, and let it stand for three days; then press out the juice, and add ten pounds of crushed sugar. After it has stood for a week, skim, strain, and bottle it, corking it loosely. When the fermentation is complete, strain it again and bottle it, corking tightly. Lay the bottles on their sides in a cool place.

MISS J.—Many magical effects are produced by heated mirrors. Any glass mirror of ordinary thickness, and well silvered, may be rendered magical by heat. One of the most simple ways to do this is to apply a heated brass tube to the silvered face. Place a screen opposite the surface of the mirror and the section of the tube will be reproduced in white, but if the surface is turned away from the screen the images upon the screen (seen only after the tube is removed) will appear dark.

WHICH IS BEST?

Tell me which is best for me,

Speak, O friend or enemy!

Tell me, teachers of mankind,

Sit in judgment on my mind:

Tell me which is best for me.

I've two loves, and both are fair;

One has gold upon her hair:

Like an autumn's woodland gleam,

Like the sunshine in a dream;

I've two loves, and both are fair;

One has eyes like Egypt's night,

With a strange, magnetic light.

And a melancholy trace

Hangs about her perfect face;

Oh, her eyes are wondrous bright!

The other sings for me a song

When the days are sad and long,

And the weary moments die

In the laughter of her eye;

In the music of her breath

Dulness finds a speedy death.

Yet the other's gift of tears

Are a true heart's messenger;

And she prays for me a prayer,

When I'm freighted with despair.

With a faith that heaven will own.

With a power a saint alone

Wieldeth in the might of prayer.

But the blue eyes ask of me,

And she pleadeth tenderly

Only for a woman's part,

All the love within my heart,

And I cannot say her nay.

Yet the dark eyes speak to me

From a mist of sympathy,

Where the soul revealed lives;

One asks for love, the other gives;

Tell me which is best for me.

SOPHIE.

LAUREA.—Mix equal parts of pure glycerine and rose-water and rub it on your face at night. This is perfectly harmless, and will whiten and refine the skin, and prevent freckling, and in time, perhaps, remove freckles. We do not like to give recipes for lotions that may be injurious. The white spots which come on your nails may be removed by rubbing on sweet oil several times a day. It is said they come from bruising or strokes. They will, of course, grow out in time, and cannot be called a blemish any more than a grey hair is a blemish.

T. B. J.—The quotation is as follows:—
"Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The four first acts already past,
The fifth shall close the drama with the day;
Time's noblest offering is the last."
It is the last stanza of Bishop Berkeley's poem "On the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America," written about 1725.

AMOR.—The brass pieces of money known as the "Sommer Islands" pieces were undoubtedly the earliest coins ever struck for America. Their date and history of their coinage are unknown, although there is reason to believe that they were current about the year 1616. John Smith, Governor of Virginia, relates that Sir George Sommers was shipwrecked upon the Bermudas, or Sommer Islands, in 1612, and that, four years later, Daniel Tucker arrived as governor of these islands. Smith adds that they found a certain kind of money in circulation, with a "hogge" on one side. It appears that the islands were infested with these animals. The Sommer Islands shilling has on one side a hog in the centre, with XII. above, and both are surrounded with a beaded circle; exterior and around the latter is the legend "Sommer Islands." On the reverse side is a ship, with canvas spread and a flag on each of her masts; a beaded circle surrounds the exterior of each side. The Sommer Islands shilling is about half the size of the shilling, and an exact counterpart, only that VI. is substituted for XII. surmounting the hog. Of these coins there are only three known—two shillings and one shilling—although the former has been imitated.

CORA.—"Titian-red" is a red much affected by Titian or Tiziano Vecellio, a celebrated Venetian painter, who lived from 1477 to 1576, for the hair of the women in his pictures. Titania was the wife of Oberon, and queen of the fairies, Oberon being king of those merry little folk.

ESTHER.—A lady, if she has any respect for herself, will never condescend to discuss with her domestics the affairs of her neighbours. When a lady manifests a prying disposition before her servants she sinks her dignity, and the most trifling and innocent circumstances are distorted and presented as evidence to the detriment of those spoken about. Especially should a wife refrain from discussing with her servants the peculiarities of her husband in conduct and temper.

BESS OF LINCOLN.—Hungary is a part of what is known as the Austro-Hungarian empire, Francis Joseph I., Emperor of Austria, also having the title of King of Hungary and Bohemia. It has a separate parliament, ministry and administration. The legislative powers rest conjointly in the king, who is sworn to maintain the constitution, and the diet, or reichstag, which consists of two houses, called the House of Magnates and the House of Representatives, the latter being elected by the people.

AURA.—1. If your contribution does not appear, you may know that the editor did not find it suitable for insertion. 2. No. You might as well send your manuscript in Sanscrit as in short-hand. 3. A good short story must be compact, bright and animated. There must be no padding.

BETA.—Old tan bark makes a cool and delightful walk under the shade of trees. It must be laid on a dry bottom, or it becomes very unpleasant in wet weather. Slag from furnaces ground up with ashes is the very best material for garden walks, and the colour is far more agreeable in hot weather than gravel. Notwithstanding its dark colour it is not so hot, and it does not pack quite so hard as the regular road material. Sand, on the other hand, though it does not pack at all, is very hot, on account of the very hard nature of its particles.

ALLAN F.—A good blackberry wine for medicinal purposes is made as follows: To two quarts of blackberry juice put one and a quarter pounds of white sugar, half an ounce of cinnamon, half an ounce of nutmeg, half an ounce of cloves, and one ounce of allspice. Let it boil a few minutes, and when cool add one pint of brandy.

S. N. J.—The legend of the "Phantom Ship" is, as stated by Sir Walter Scott, that she was originally a vessel loaded with great wealth, but a horrible murder having been committed on board, the plague broke out among the crew, and no port would allow the ship to enter, so it was doomed to float about like a ghost, as a punishment for the crimes committed on board of her. The "Flying Dutchman" is a name given by sailors to a spectral ship seen in stormy weather off the Cape of Good Hope, and the sight of which is considered the worst of all omens. The superstition has its origin probably in the looming, or apparent suspension, in the air of some ship out of sight. The phantom ship is distinguished from earthly vessels by bearing a press of sail, when all others are unable, from sheer stress of weather, to show an inch of canvas.

W. H. M.—1. The highest tank that can be held in cribbage is three fives, and a jack in hand, and a five turned up, which being counted in the usual way equals twenty-nine pips. 2. The apparatus known as the condenser is used on the majority of sea-going vessels. The idea is this:—If the steam can be condensed by the application of cold water to the outside of the vessel containing it, it is evident that a boiler might be filled with pure fresh water on leaving port, and this water could be converted into steam, back again into water a second time into steam, and so on in succession, without ever coming in contact with the salt. This led to the invention of the apparatus now known by the name given above. The condenser consists of a flat vessel, in the bottom of which are a number of small apertures, and from these pipes in tubes are led to another similar flat vessel. Both vessels are air-tight. Into the top vessel the steam to be condensed is admitted, and passing through the tubes, which are immersed in cold sea-water, it is perfectly condensed on reaching the under vessel, from which the newly-formed water is drawn off by an air-pump. As the cold sea-water becomes heated it is pumped off, and a fresh supply admitted. If salt is allowed to form a crust on the bottom of the boiler it causes much waste, for, from its bad conducting power, this part is often heated to redness before the required amount of steam is produced, thus causing not only loss of fuel, but a rapid wearing away of the boiler-plates.

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